

Assignment 1

Part 1

I would say that the single story that caught my attention most was that of Roger Donlon in “We were babes in arms in every way”. I think it struck me the most because of the graphic nature of the story’s content and the nonchalant way in which he’s retelling it. It’s a very short story, and he relays events quickly and effectively. I find myself constantly on the lookout when reading this type of material for correlations that can be found between warfare and sports, which I find interesting, understandable, and yet also reprehensible all at the same time.

“What keeps you going at times like that is the love you feel for your fellow teammates.” (p.15)

As for the reliability of Donlon’s story, I’m sure it’s mostly accurate. Most of the details pertaining to his story involve actions that he was privy to, and some he even has scars to show for. Any inaccuracy that might be found in his account I’m sure are easily explained. Some of the events of the story seem action-packed and hectic, I would imagine that in such a situation an observer or participant is probably more invested in reacting, as opposed to taking accurate notes, and is therefore readily forgivable. Having been there and witnessed this particular event, gives the author great credibility.

It is here that I’d like to make a note about the author’s writing style, or perhaps more accurately, the story-tellers speaking style. Donlon’s pretty good about not speaking in absolutes, most of the numerical information he gives is rough estimates, which I appreciate.

“our Strike Force went from three hundred down to two hundred, and possible closer to a hundred.” (p.14)

I don’t think that his account of events is clouded by too much subjectivity, nor do I believe that too much time has passed in order to him to give an accurate portrayal of events. This story reads as if it’s been told before, perhaps many times.

Part 2

There are so many disappointing moments that can be witnessed in Part 2 of this book, oftentimes situations, sometimes sentiment or experiences. There was definitely one experience however that stood out greatly in my mind. There’s a situation that arises at the end of Henry Prunier’s story “These were not ragtag farmers” where his comments regarding Ho Chi Minh, caused him to be labeled as a Communist. I find this not only disheartening, but deflating and enraging at the same time. I abhor those situations, where someone or some group will stop listening to your argument, or label

you, based solely on the *topic* of your argument as opposed to the *content*. Prunier's argument didn't even pertain to the *rightness* or *wrongness* of North Vietnam's leader, he was simply stating that Ho had the support of the Vietnamese people, an argument that this book corroborates greatly.

Another similar example can be seen in Paul Kattenburg's story "What's good for Peru is good for Vietnam", where Kattenburg is summarily dismissed from conversations regarding the future of Vietnam, and transferred to a different department, for stating that perhaps it was time to withdraw.

As for one positive lesson that may have been learned from an account in this book, I'm particularly drawn to Daniel Redmond's account in "The doctor who won the war in Indochina". In his transcription he portrays frequently his ability for free thought, exhibiting his ability to form his own opinion despite the rhetoric and propaganda he's surrounded by:

I always laughed when I saw the big sign in the LSTs – "This Is Your Passage to Freedom." (p.48)

He further goes on to attack Tom Dooley's book *Deliver Us from Evil*, stating that it was "*a piece of shit*". In doing this he's showing that although he can have respect for Dooley *the man*, he doesn't have to respect all of his practices, or the anti-communist rhetoric that his book contained. I find this uplifting, it seems that in so many of these stories, the narrator states some bit about how they didn't know what they were doing, that they just went where they were told. I like this story because Kattenburg gives his informed opinion on the things that he can, while also portraying his humble ignorance when applicable.

"I do think it was right for us to take the people down there, but it was our first commitment to the disaster that happened in the sixties. I never had any idea we'd be involved in a war out there ten years later." (P.48)

Bryan Lewis

October 12th, 2014

HST 195: History of the Vietnam War

Assignment One

Part One

Phan Xuan Sinh's story stuck with me because of how it shows Vietnam as "A war with countless heartbreaking experiences." (Appy 25) along with how the patriotic the Vietnamese were for their country. His story is heartbreaking when his unit opened fire on a group of fishermen that they believed were the Viet Cong, I feel this part of the story shows both the high tension feeling at the time and the (continuing theme as I read more) misinformation that the U.S. and ARVN had about the North Vietnamese and Vietnamese culture in general. The story showed brutality and the Vietnamese's patriotism and love of their homeland when, "Before taking off, we burned down their house to make sure they wouldn't come back." (Appy 26), the seemingly brutality of this was supposedly for Vietnamese's 'protection'; though the peasants later still returned to the burned land of their ancestors. Phan Xuan Sinh's began to see that "The land was all they had, all they loved." (Appy 26) It was their home and they would never abandon it. I feel that Phan Xuan Sinh's account is trustworthy, it didn't seem as if he tried to exaggerated any detail but just give an account of what he experienced; though he might have a slightly skewed view being part of the war itself it seems Phan Xuan Sinh is more neutral (even though he was part of the ARVN) when he says "People like me didn't hate the other side . . . We just hoped to find a way to live together with our brothers." (Appy 26).

Part Two

The most disappointing story for me to read was Ngo Vinh Long, mainly because he showed the change that countless Vietnamese people went through, from liking the U.S. to protesting their support of the Diem's southern government. The start of his story he was so pro-American that he refused to learn French and learned English instead. He saw America as helpful at first even though it was behind the Southern government: "I knew that America was behind the war but I didn't believe my father. I thought the United States was doing this for the good of Vietnam, that the U.S. stood for freedom and democracy." (Appy 56). This view changed as he began to make maps for the U.S., traveling around Vietnam he saw that the people were forced to leave their ancestral land and often faced starvation in the government's "agrovilles"* which later became "strategic hamlets". This plan backed by the U.S. was something Long protested saying "This is not how you defeat the Communists, this is how you make more

Communists." (Appy 58-59).

The overall standpoint and ignorance of Vietnamese culture and history is a continually disappointing aspect that commonly reappears throughout the stories such as Malcolm Browne's account of Dam Doi (Appy 66, Paragraph 2) an outpost that continually did nothing but bring death for those stationed there. I feel that Sergei Khrushchev also helps show how disappointing U.S. policies were towards Vietnam. The quote "It was a simple rule of the Cold War. If you could do something bad to the opposite side you had to do it." (Appy 88) This point of view I felt was strongly adopted by the U.S., they weren't concerned with helping Vietnam be free, they were concerned with stopping Communism.

I feel that many of the stories showed "hope", "compassion", "goodness" or the "potential for good", especially in the beginning. Henry Prunier said how when he arrived they (Vietnamese) threw a feast for them, "They slaughtered a calf and served us beer." (Appy 39), this act of togetherness made it seem that U.S.-Vietnam relations could have been a positive experience. Henry even tells how Ho Chi Minh once said "Yes, I'm a Communist, but there's no reason we can't be friends, why we can't live together." (Appy 40). Another aspect of hope I saw in the stories is with Malcolm and Le Lieu Brown two people each from a separate country in this war not only found a way to coexist peacefully but got married, overcoming the negativity of the war.

*Terms

Aggroville - Newly constructed villages by Diem's government (sometimes just fenced in old villages). Used to relocate peasants to strategic locations where the South Vietnam army could more easily defend them (later converted to 'strategic hamlets' with minor fortifications. Unpopular with the peasants.

Word Cited

Appy, Christian G. *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*. New York: Viking, 2003. Print.

Collin Ellis

HST 195

Assignment 1

Part 1

George Watkins had a very attention getting story of his time in Vietnam. His story helps to put in perspective how the U.S. grunts were essentially just pawns of the U.S. government and their anti-Communism agenda. George Watkins seems to be a reliable source of information with his first hand account. Evidence of his reliability beyond just the fact that he was there he also doesn't carry much bitterness. After being through what Watkins went through one could easily justify an anger toward the government and anyone else he could blame for his deployment and life changing injuries he received from combat. Instead he is more saddened by the fact that Vietnam happened and all of the loss of his fellow brothers in arms. This is another reason why Watkins story is so memorable because of his mostly positive attitude through it all. Being in Vietnam makes George Watkins more credible at least for his part in the war than someone who wasn't there. Reading some of these first hand accounts one could argue that they might be subjective, but in Watkins case this does not seem to be the case.

Part 2

A somewhat disappointing story was the one told by Ngo Vinh Long. His views early on and his interest in America make it very interesting that he was anti war, but it also deserves some respect because he appreciated America at the same time he wasn't a huge fan of their policies. The way emigrants from Vietnam to America after the war treated him was also a rather disappointing and scary thing to read. Essentially being attacked by people from his own home country for his less than popular view would be an awful thing to have happen, but the fact that he continued to speak out regardless really speaks to his character and his dedication to his beliefs and values.

Dennis Calciano

Roger Donlon, the Green Beret captain who trained Nam Dong special forces, caught my eye. He started out in the thick of the war in a foreign country where there weren't many American troops to back him. Donlon helped to train massive amounts of Vietnamese soldiers to fight off the Vietcong regime. Not only was he some of the first American influence, Donlon also was the first American in the Vietnam war to receive the Medal of Honor. Although it doesn't state through his words exactly why he was awarded the medal, it explains through a citation. I'm not saying it's not true, it's just some of the story could have been embellished to make himself look more honorable. Whatever did happen in this battle resulted in a successful defense of his camp. Donlon then goes on to say, "We were working with and against cultures that were two thousand years old. They could manipulate us." I'm curious exactly what he means by this in his interview, he doesn't go on to talk about it. He could have forgotten or left out details of his time with the Nam Dong soldiers, it's hard to say.

It's disappointing that Henry Prunier helped to train Ho Chi Minh's troops to fight off the Japanese. He didn't know, but eventually that would come back to bite us in the ass. I understand that it helped the Vietnamese gain independence from Japan, but we also prepared them to kill us on the battlefield. It's not that Henry is to blame, it's just unfortunate with the events that lead up to this that helped to influence communism. I almost wonder if it would have been better for us not to get involved with something like that and just let it happen.

In the same way that training Vietcong soldiers could have eventually been harmful for a tactical standpoint, it was a good way to show our democratic influence. We helped to aid their troops in the hopes that we would make a good impression on Vietnam's political standings. Not only that, but we helped nurse Ho Chi Minh back to health which was a nice gesture.

Dez Hansen

HST 195

Assignment 1

Part 1

The story by Phan Xuan Sinh caught my interest the most and had the greatest impact on me. Phan Xuan Sinh told of his tragic experience of a couple different events. The first was that ARVN mistook fishermen with fishing polls for the Viet Con with rifles. They opened up with “all our firepower-rifles, machine guns, everything” killing 20 innocent commoners and wounding 40. He then went on to tell about an old man and women living in a “free-fire” zone that would not leave because it was their home.

These stories really impacted me because it showed me how the innocent commoners were the ones most affected by this war. The speaker obviously felt the war was useless and hated it, but regardless of his biased feelings, I believe his stories to be trustworthy and believable. With him being there in that moment gives him more credibility that makes not only his opinion, but also his experiences, reliable.

Part 2

The story in part 2 that was the most disappointing to me was the very last story by Luyen Nguyen. Reading his story I had a lot of different emotions. At first I was sad and empathetic for what Luyen and his family had to go through for all those years, and then I felt very frustrated and angry with the United States for condoning such a “top-secret mission” that was set up to fail. What is even more frustrating is that if a “lost commando” was lucky enough to survive there imprisonment the United States only reimbursed them \$42,500, not nearly enough to compensate for their suffering and heart ache.

It is hard for me to see anything good that came from this story. All I feel is disappointment that my country initiated and caused so much pain for Luyen Nguyen. I suppose if I really dig deep, I hope that my country and political leaders have learned and grown from such an experience. To me, Luyen Nguyen seems to have a spirit of forgiveness in his heart and has moved on from such a terrible thing that has happened to him. I was happy to read that he was able to be with his wife again and have a relationship with his children.

Dylan Millsaps

History 195

L00302255

In part 1 the story that caught my interest the most (although not the most enjoyable) would have to be the story of Dang Vu Hiep. This was the most interesting story because rarely have I read an opposing point of view where I felt somewhat understanding of his/her motives and views on a conflict. When I read Hiep's story I can feel myself sympathizing with him. Usually when reading an anti-American view it is hard for me to understand let alone sympathize. His story is relatable because just like any American serviceman he loves his country and will do whatever is necessary to help his country succeed. This is a point of view that is easy to understand. Unlike other anti-American views Hiep sees the Americans as just the enemy nothing more and nothing less. He did not make it more personal than it needed to be. Hiep didn't underestimate American forces and this was evident when he said, "Many things were new to us. Sometimes we had to fight against airborne units with four hundred helicopters. With all those choppers they seemed pretty strong." Although Hiep had a little respect for American forces he was not lacking in confidence and intelligence. His intelligence shines through when he says, "Then we began to see the advantage of stretching out enemy forces by luring them away from their large bases. Once their troops were all strung out we could attack where they were least powerful." I find Hiep a very reliable source because by the end of the war he was a general in NVA. Although his view is inevitably biased, he does mention some defeat and hardship but mostly he speaks about tactics he himself implemented in the war.

In Part 2 I was most disappointed with the story of Henry Prunier because in this story I learned that an American Special Forces team parachuted into Vietnam and personally trained Vo Nguyen Giap (eventual leader of North Vietnam's People's Army) as well as Ho Chi Minh (eventual leader of North Vietnam). I understand that there was no way of knowing these two specific men will be Americas largest enemies 20 years later but it is still hard to swallow that these men had somewhat American combat training. Another part of the story I found disappointing is when the speaker says, "I was sort of a silent antiwar person." I found this disappointing because although the speaker had experience in Vietnam and sympathized with them, it is still your countryman fighting and dying for what our country believed at the time. You must have respect for those who have past and their families. It is disrespectful in my opinion when you openly are against what they themselves fought for or what their family member died for.

The most positive sentiment I could find in part 2 came from the story told by Richard Olsen. Not his entire story is positive; he talks about the downfalls of working with the South Vietnamese army, their lack of courage in battle and how predictable their habits were while they were in the field. What was unique to Olsen was that when he looked back at his experience in Vietnam it is not negative or upsetting because for so many their experience left them angry and forever changed. Olsen's views on his experience were exemplified when he said, "So I'm not one of the veterans who's embittered with a whole host of grievances. I have nostalgia and enormous reverence for my experience."

Hannah Morton

10/12/2014

Joe Escobar

History 195

Assignment 1

Part 1

While reading *Patriotism, The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides* one would feel a sense of sadness while reading the stories of those who were involved in the Vietnam war. Whether they were there as a soldier, protestor, general or even a friend, everyone was impacted. But certain stories are bound to stand out greater meaning to the readers, for instance the story given by George Watkins. George was one of the many that had lost something significant to them during the war, his legs and eyes. But unlike most in this sort of situation, George stood with a positive attitude about the war times and his loss. He tells the story of how he, with other soldiers were testing of landmines when one went off causing damage to his legs, and later his eyes. He explains the reality of the harsh times that the soldiers were presented in, and the things that endured. One would feel that the stories he is explaining are true and real, because of the great detail he gets into. With things such as the radio saved him, because the large piece of metal went into the radio and not him. As well as the positive attitude about the things that he had went through, this is an important way to look at any situation like this. One would applaud George for feeling this way.

Part 2

“They were victims more of the French than the Communists” Daniel Redmond stated in his interview. Daniel, like many felt a variety of emotions on assist anting with the moving of the South Vietetnamise people to the North. Daniel felt all though the French were moving them as a herd, and had little care and respect for the people of Vietnam people, this was disappointing because the United States had helped to support the French in the move of the people to the north. Although many felt that the move to the North was going to be in their best interest, therefore they were ready to make the move. The conditions that the Vietnamese people were living in is also highly disappointing, the way he describes the smell, and dirtiness, as well as the woman who gave birth and refused doctors help out of fear that they may hurt her or her child.

After reading his story, one would feel as though they would gain something from helping one another. Daniel felt a sense of relief in helping these people evacuate the

horrible conditions that they were living in. Whether the North would be the better option was the concern, but he felt as though the imposed Catholic religion and living conditions could essentially help these people to live happier and healthier lives. Therefore it makes one feel as though there is somewhere that they too can help people to change their lives.

George Watkins' retelling of his experience fighting and losing his legs and eyesight in Vietnam is a powerful testament to both the graphic and unsettling nature of the war, and the supreme nature of the human spirit. His poignantly inarticulate speech and poor grammar denoted a lack of education and portrayed a sadly accurate picture of uninformed and well-intentioned young men being exploited in Vietnam. Yet Watkins' compassion for the Vietnamese people so far exceeded what anyone could potentially hope or expect from a disenfranchised veteran. He demonstrated an unfathomable respect for the Vietnamese, and even stated, "They had to be some good people to withstand all that...They's some of the most determined people I've ever run into." Watkins obviously grasped the failure of the war from his deeply personal experience of losing his sight and mobility while performing duties he was inadequately trained for, in a war he knew very little about. However, his frustration was limited to his recollections of visiting the wall, running his hands over the names of fallen soldiers. Watkins spent no time in self-pity, but rather seemed to mourn the loss of lives that he perhaps suspected had more potential than his own.

Though in every aspect of storytelling there is a measure of embellishment, Watkins' recounting of his Vietnam experience seemed to emanate reliability. His battle wounds were evidence to the credibility of his story, and his avoidance of sensationalism further supported his experiences as fact. If his story was elaborated, it was surely only in minute ways that were undoubtedly the product of years of reflection on every single detail of that life-changing day. The end result remained unceremonious and haunting in its simplicity. Watkins' final request to the author to "fancy" up his story speaks to his unassuming and demure nature, and showed his clear insecurities that the factual story he provided would interest very few in a hostile post-Vietnam America.

In part two of "Patriots", the stories took a general theme around the lack of knowledge about Vietnam as a reason for U.S. failure in the war. Therefore, the vast majority of the tales were all disappointing in at least some way, and most of that discouragement resulted from United States policy and procedure in Vietnam. Malcolm Browne's narrative was particularly frustrating, however, but for an entirely different reason. Daniel Redmond's account of the mass relocation of North Vietnamese into the south to escape religious persecution under the Communist regime triggered feelings of empathy and understanding for the unfortunate who chose to leave their homes rather than surrender their beliefs. A basic knowledge of the birth of our own country gives the merit of this endeavor roots and substance. Yet Malcolm Browne recounts the terrible suffering of the Buddhists in South Vietnam under the Diem regime, all because they failed to conform to Catholicism. The fact that our country so heavily supported a South Vietnamese government that persecuted their own people for refusing to adopt the religious beliefs of the leadership is particularly disheartening and confounding. It is a backwards way of thinking that Americans so often assume we have fully evolved out of. Yet even if we attempt to avoid this type of oppression in our own country, the problem will not resolve until our government stops looking the other way in our foreign affairs when it best suits our endeavors to do so.

While most of the stories held points of frustration and outright disbelief, they also all held small glimmers of hope. When Rufus Phillips talked about Edward Lansdale's

insistence that the South Vietnamese understood they were working for their own country and freedom—not for the United States—it was a reminder that despite many missteps, there were a lot of Americans deployed who had the best intentions for Vietnam as a whole, and were unaffected by political agendas. John Singlaub's reports of educating villages about sanitation and treating their medical conditions gave reassurance that for small groups at various moments in time, American presence in Vietnam eased suffering. He equated it to "the feeling of being missionaries," and spoke of feeling good about what they were doing. When it became obvious that the Viet Minh were intercepting the "generous gift packages" sent back with the North Vietnamese from Paradise Island, Singlaub's company made a point to send two packages: one for the enemy to intercept, and one for the civilian to keep. These are just a few of many practices and habits that provided no substantial tactile or psychological advantage to our military, but that our troops chose to do anyways. These examples reinforce the belief that though U.S. motives for being in Vietnam remain controversial, the intentions of the vast majority of troops were noble and selfless.

There are many horror stories about the war in Vietnam, and it is hard for the general public to reconcile that some progress may have been made in the midst of so much death and suffering. It can't be compartmentalized so easily. The morality of United States intervention in Vietnam is very questionable, and the amount of money thrown into the conflict is appalling. The loss of young life, both American and Vietnamese, is tragic, and the wounds and terror that the survivors faced upon returning home will never be understood by those of us who were not there. But to criticize the war in such a way that strips it down to its bare, ugly bones does not do justice to the servicemen who were there with the intention of allowing a better life, free of oppression, for the Vietnamese people. The war was senseless in many ways, but the sacrifices and efforts made there were not pointless.

In Part 1 of Patriots, the story that was the most impactful on me was General Dang Vu Hiep's story. Hiep's telling of his time spent fighting didn't seem bitter, or disgusted, just straight-forward and factual; with almost hints of nostalgia. His portion of his story is focused on his ten year service around the Central Highland. Hiep said that whoever could control Central Highland could control all of Vietnam. On February 7, 1965 Hiep and his troops attacked Pleiku, which happened to be the headquarters of Saigon's 23rd Division. This attack was nothing out of the ordinary but there just so happened to be the day McGeorge Bundy, U.S. National Security Adviser, was there. This resulted in the Americans commencing a series of airstrikes. Hiep tells us the readers that this was a scapegoat for the American's to begin their airstrikes. Even stating that Secretary of Defense had told him and others that had they never attacked, airstrikes would have never begun. There were multiple points in this story that just kind of stuck with me. The biggest one being that Hiep at the end of his story, he informs us that those years in Central Highlands were the high point of his life. The phrase "high point of my life" was something I never thought I would hear when someone spoke of their time fighting in the Vietnam war. In a war with so much loss, confusion, frustration, anguish, and destruction it's amazing to hear something an event so negative in history has any kind of positive memory in someone's mind.

In Part 2, the story I found most disappointing was Rufus "Rufe" Phillips story. I didn't find it boring, hard to read anything in this book and even consider it even close to boring. What I found disappointing about this particular story was that I felt it didn't add anything to what we've learned or heard so far about the relations and operations of the South Vietnamese government. In episode 2 of Vietnam: A Television History, this was covered expansively and quite extensively. It was covered so well, I in fact didn't think Phillips added anything worth knowing to this piece of history. Nothing against him personally, it just felt more like a missed opportunity to build of something already built upon. I understand that this story in the book and the one in the movie have no relation on how they were told. But when I finished, I felt a longing for more information that wasn't satisfied.

Now the story that I thought had the positive message was Ngo Vinh Long's. His came as a story you would hear from a friend of yours. No real tricks or flairs, but not so straightforward that you would think it be a lesson. He starts off with his poor upbringing, and goes on to place in our minds how he became the man he did. His father, teaching him everything possible, and Long taking it all in through the sheer power of will. Going on to become the highest scoring academic student in all of South Vietnam When later in life he was hired on by American's to make maps of South Vietnam, he proved to be the right man for the job. He being a Vietnamese himself made him trustworthy towards peasants. The thing that changed Long from being a map maker to the front runner of his anti-war attitude here later in America, occurred in the village Ka Rom. When Long and his team of map-makers came across the village he saw that the people were starving to death. He refused to move on or continue his job, and he had his

team stay in the village and make food for the people. A combination of rice, lots of water, and sugar created a gruel eventually everyone healthy. Long didn't have to think twice about what was wrong or right, he knew wrong when he saw it and refused to continue on ignoring it. These were his people suffering and from then on he did everything in his power to help them. In these times so many people would have gladly taken any opportunity they could have to watch out for their own necks. President Diem showed us he was well aware of that. Long, with this opportunity to take a great job and make his own means and potentially have his life set. He resigned in 1962 and joined the Saigon Student Union and protested with others against what was going on in Vietnam. Even when he made it to the United States, he continued his anti-war attitude speaking out at Harvard. Even after the war had ended, he continued his teaching and expressing of being against the war. How could anyone read this entry and not be moved? I can't confidently say what I would do if I were in Long's position. Not to say I am selfish, but we usually don't know how one reacts in a time of crisis until that crisis is occurring. But with Long there was no hesitation, he knew what needed to be done and he did everything in his power to do it. The goodness of this man is not measured by the outcome of the war, but all that he attempted to do regardless of what the outcome could be. The lesson, as astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson would say, is "Just do cool things". Fighting for what is right, like Ngo Vinh Long is a very cool thing.

Kasey Harmon

HST 195 Vietnam War

Assignment 1

Part 1

George Watkins story of how he lost both his legs and eyes was one of the more attention grabbing stories. Unlike many of the political leaders and personnel of that time George's story has more effect on readers because he has a more genuine and true feel to his story. When you read his words you cannot help but feel a bit sorry for him, in the sense he is just the son of a coal miner and always did what he was told. Throughout his story George never talks badly about the Vietnamese; the only negative thing he says is "I would like to get ahold of that one that set that booby trap." Through all of paragraph seven he does nothing but talk positively about the Vietnamese people. Because of my past experiences this story stood out to me. His story brought back many memories of watching fellow Marines get blown up; as well as, my own personal experience of stepping on a pressure detonated Improvised Explosive Device (booby trap). Although I was very fortunate in the fact I did not lose my legs or eyes as he did. Being a former Marine Corps combat engineer I get more of a connection when I read about George Watkins than any other story. When you live through such a traumatic event like that it stays with you forever. It is almost as if it gets permanently chiseled into your brain and you can remember it as if it happened yesterday. George stated in the last paragraph that he does not have any bitterness towards the Vietnamese, which is of no surprise. Many veterans of Vietnam do not have hate or bitterness towards the enemy. However, many old vets do feel some amount of aggression towards certain political personnel. Over all I found the story to be very truthful and enjoyable.

Part 2

In the first half of Daniel Redmond's story, it was very intriguing and informative. I had no previous knowledge that there were nine hundred thousand Vietnamese refugees evacuated from North Vietnam and transported to the South. There is no way to fathom what kind of physical condition all those civilians were in. When Daniel tells the short story of the woman who "gave birth, refused help, bit off the umbilical cord, took the baby to the dirty river and washed it off." Stories like this are a real eye opener to someone who hasn't been to a "third world" country and seen what kind of environmental challenges these people face on a daily basis. Daniel's experiences with that evacuation are the stories that deserve to be written about and shared with future generations to help avoid and keep events like that from happening again. However, the second half of Redmond's story was very disappointing and infuriating. In fact, it almost ruined the story as a whole. Tom Dooley's short story should not have been apart of Redmond's experience; even though, Redmond worked with Dooley in Vietnam. Dooley's story takes away from the impact likeness of Daniel's experience. As Daniel stated in his last paragraph "Tom was given to exaggeration," which in many opinions

was a popular quality amongst many writers of the Vietnam era. Having not read Toms book "Deliver Us From Hell," but judging from what Redmond says its most likely stretches the truth too much. I would liked to have read more about what Redmond went through and less about Tom Dooley, if none at all.

John Singlaub's story should have been twice as long as it was, if not the longest of the entire book. If Appy would have not have described him as "a short man with a grey crew cut, large ears, and a charming smile," you could have easily imagined John looking much like movie star Sam Elliot, a tall chiseled man with a fantastic mustache and strong Texas like voice. Having never heard or read about SOG before it sounds as though it had been a highly secretive operation. You easily identify that Singlaub strongly believed in his mission and what they did in Vietnam. It sounded as though they were almost using reverse psychology on the North Vietnamese civilians by "indoctrinating the concept of freedom" into their minds. Their idea behind the use of the radios were ingenious, and by having the radios only tuned to the "Voice of Freedom" and the "Patriots of Freedom" stations sounds like it would have worked. Basically, it was a way to "trash talk" the North Vietnamese communist government. You could distinctly tell how Singlaub felt about the "Liberals" and the celebrity antiwar activists. For example, Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden and how they would tell Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese to "Just hold on, hold on. We're winning it at home. We're destroying the morale of the people at home." As the protesters spat and publically humiliated our veterans we helped the communists win the war. After reading John Singlaub story and also reading Lt. Dave Grossman's book "On Killing," you can really see how we failed our veterans as a country.

Marquita Luicer

Joe Escobar

HST 195-History of Vietnam War

October 11, 2014

WAR HEROES

Roger Donlon “We were babes in arms in every way,” was a story that had an impact on me and caught my attention. It was not because he was the first American in the Vietnam War to receive the Medal of Honor, the highest U.S. military decoration or even that he was a Green Beret captain but it was his recap of the battle at the Nam Dong camp. The way in which he described the thing that kept them going at times was the love they had for their fellow teammates, not necessarily out of respect but as the years past realizing, “it was really a deep, deep love” they had for each other. Also, when he got out of the hospital and visiting the beach, seeing a navy ship flying “Old Glory,” in thinking about “how beautiful and healing it was in a lot of ways,” and also the fact of not being able to put up their flag in camp how it made them “all a little more lonely.” It was at that moment of reading that I looked up and saw my neighbor’s flag flying that it brought emotion and a tear to my eye.

Credibility came during the interview when Roger Donlon took the time to enjoy the precious moments in life and entertained his baby granddaughter then pointing out the patriotic colors of his birdhouse in his yard of his Midwest home. This depicted a man who had lived many events in his lifetime and while near the end of his life, saw nothing to gain by fabricating a story of a major event in his life. One does not simply “forget” an event such as the one Roger Donlon experienced, describing while being under heavy military attack on his camp, with shrapnel wounds all over his body, crawling and scrambling back and forth across the camp dragging wounded men to safety and giving them first aid, and seeing the tragedy of legs being blown off of men and still running on stumps, as Roger stated “are things you’d like to forget,” these are images people never forget.

The story in “The emperor has no clothes,” “is where I found disappointment in the area of the attitude of the American wartime policy makers, such as Robert McNamara, and the lack of intelligence, who didn’t understand and appreciate Vietnam’s history, language, culture, or values. He admitted that only in private that our intervention and involvement in Vietnam was wrong and that the war could not be won while misleading the American people with false reports of the “great progress in every dimension of our efforts,” in Vietnam. It came from the top administrators down who underestimated the Vietnamese’s will for freedom and what they were willing to do to achieve it, “after all, as Lyndon

Johnson put it, Vietnam was just a “raggedy-ass, little fourth-rate country.” To those who understood it first hand as Roger Donlon did stated that they were “working with and against cultures that were two thousand years old,” observing this during the battle at the Nam Dong camp, having a third of his Vietnamese Strike force fighting for the other side.

Another example that was disappointing to read was in the story of John Singlaub where Ho Chi Minh and his people were encouraged with the traitors, giving examples of Jane Fonda, Ramsey Clark and Tom Hayden, that went over there and said, “Just hold on, hold on. We’re winning it at home. We’re destroying the morale of the people at home.” How damaging this was to the men’s morale with the antiwar movement, which was Communist’s strategy to destroy the American morale.

We need to remember those who have made sacrifices and have given their lives so that as Americans we can enjoy our freedom of choice and the right to protest in our beliefs and believe the way we want and have freedom of religion. The potential for good that comes out of these stories is that we can be mindful of the government when becoming involved in world conflicts that we do not have to believe what they are feeding us or what the media tells us. Keeping in mind that history often repeats itself and as our foreign policy, leaders and president make decisions regarding our current affairs such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) we have more information available to us with the benefit of social media that we did not have fifty years ago. With the ability for online social media, it is harder to hide the truth. Let the memories and stories of these courageous men and women live forever in our hearts and minds.

WORK CITED

(1) Appy, Christian G., “Patriots, the Vietnam War remembered from all sides.” Published by the Penguin Group (USA) Inc. Copyright Christian G. Appy, 2003 Print. p. (12-15, 79-81, & 93.)

Patrick Figueroa

Professor Escobar

History 195

12 October 2014

Assignment 1

The story by George Watkins “That sand was probably the only thing that saved me” had the biggest impact on me. Mainly because in the beginning he went on about how his father wanted his sons to be safe and he forbid them to work in the coalmines. Little did his father know that his teenage son would be shipped off to a hostile environment where everything is a threat to his life. George and the rest of his brigade were terrified of sleeping; they feared if they fell asleep the enemy would ambush them. George Watkins seems to remember all the little details of his deployment to Vietnam which definitely validates his story. Physically being in the position gives him validity over any Vietnam historian, because he has seen things that are indescribable.

Of the stories I read from part two, I think the most disappointing story was “These were not ragtag farmers” because of the way he described Ho Chi Minh. He described his condition as “dying from malaria, dengue fever, dysentery-whatever tropical disease you can think of,” and from his story Ho Chi Minh seemed to be really fond of Henry Prunner. I was also disappointed in the American Government when Ho Chi Minh said “Yes, I’m a communist, but there’s no reason why we can’t be friends, why can’t we live together.” It seems as if Ho Chi Minh has no prior problem with the Americans and the United States just created a war that did not have to happen.

A positive lesson I learned from this story is that even Communists can be good people. The American Government brainwashed its citizens into thinking every communist was pure evil, however this story proved that to be false.

Part 1:

Ta Quang Thinh *"They carried me the whole way back to the North."*

I was most impacted by this man's story and the ordeal he endured. What caught my attention was that this man was a nurse helping people during the war. His reason for being in the war was to take care of the hurt, but found himself the one that needed cared for after being wounded in the Tay Ninh Providence in 1967. Thinh was the only survivor in a bombing of a jungle hospital. When he was dug out he was moved to another jungle hospital in the south where he stayed 4 years there receiving treatment. His story is believable to me because it portrays unimaginable trauma, yet he tells it like it is just a story. It almost seems as if he is still in shock. I think his credibility comes from the fact he is in fact injured and was gone for such a long time. I imagine those 4 years in the jungle getting cared for ran together and may be hard for him to remember. I think his suffering was described accurately. I can vividly imagine him having to bounce along a trail for 7 months and how much endurance one would need for such a journey home. I am impressed that his companions would go to such great lengths to return someone to their home. This story was very endearing and showed great strength.

Part 2: Point of View: *The Vietnam war was so wasteful with human lives from all sides.*

Ngo Vinh Long *"If they're making maps, they're preparing for war."*

Long was a positive person to read about. His character and values show when giving his account. I found him believable based on his conduct when he stayed to help starving people in Vietnam to his involvement in forming policies later in life.

Long gave us great insight and background to what was really happening in Vietnam. Overall his story made me feel that this war was so wasteful from all parties who were involved.

Long describes the waste of human life from the French when they would make patrols and dump killed people in the rivers. The image of corpses contaminating the lakes and ponds that the Vietnamese use with the decaying bodies of their own people is haunting. He goes on to talk about the Diem government and the creation of the "argovilles". Not only was there destruction of villages, their fields were often burned and wasted. The spirit of the Vietnamese people was also destroyed when they were "rounded up and herded" to these "argovilles" where they were fenced in. Long goes on to tell of a village named Ka Rom where 200 people had died from starvation. When he had asked the U.S. Embassy for help, they refused claiming "this is how you defeat the Communists". Long's story ends with his telling's of Diem's government, the government the U.S. was supporting. He recalls the public executions where the heads of the victims would be put on stakes and displayed in front of the forts to intimidate the people from joining the revolution against Diem. I can sympathize with Long and his disgust for this "savage

time”.

Malcolm Browne *“You could smell burning flesh.”*

Malcolm Browne’s story reiterated the waste of human lives and power from slaughters in Dam Doi by the Viet Cong. Browne was also front row for the demonstration by Thich Quang Duc who took his own life to protest Diem’s prohibition against the Buddhists. Browne recounts taking picture to keep himself busy so he didn’t have to focus on the horror he was watching. Lastly, Browne tells of a young American and Vietnamese couple on a dinner date that was killed by Viet Cong when they attacked the restaurant they were eating at.

Death came from all sides and so many lives were wasted on enemies and civilians.

Roger Donlon—Part 1

Reading Roger's story you would not have known he was the first American to receive the Medal of Honor in the Vietnam War—speaking very honestly, humbly, and affectionately throughout his interview with Appy. Honestly, while reading there was an increase in heart rate, palms became sweaty and jaw clenched. Because there is a close, personal tie to Vietnam (my father) stories—any stories—are intriguing and always leave room for “is there more where that came from?!” and Roger's story certainly left thoughts lingering throughout the night. The Green Beret had become a symbol of excellence upon entry into the Vietnam War and it's safe to say that Mr. Donlon was not only deserving of the Medal of Honor, but he valiantly upheld what the Green Beret stood for—excellence, courage, and its mark of distinction in the fight for freedom! (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_beret). Talking about such specific details so many years after the war are a gut wrenching reminder of the impact this significant time in history was for so many. His striking memory—and perhaps the most attention grabbing—was his story about Pop Alamo and his reflection, *“What keeps you going in 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.”* Personally being told just the other day (from a veteran whom fought with my recently deceased father), *“...spent most of our time there together, 24/7. He was the man I wanted watching my back, I knew I was safe. He would have died for me and me for him.”* Therefore, reading the excerpt from Mr. Donlon creates exceptional credibility and a level of trust in him that is unexplainable. The credibility factor rises yet again as he discusses the actual attack, not only because of details he recalls, but because he refers to the enemy as gallant and brave. Throughout his story, he does not ever refer to the enemy in a significantly negative manner like some of the other individuals throughout Part 1. Admittedly, there are several instances that he would like to forget—the interpreter whose legs were taken off at the knees after being shot, but kept running on the stumps but died within 30 seconds! Memories articulated clearly and concisely, and Appy notes he talks with a calm, even-paced voice—indicating that, yes he will share these delicate memories, but they are still painful, real, and raw. Although there is subjectivity in the story, there is also a lot of objectivity and factual information. Again, because of military status and the prestigious award received, credibility plays an all-time high. However, while reading it you cannot help but be drawn into the story and feel like you are sitting face to face with Mr. Donlon. He is proud to be an American, proud of our American flag. Recalling his discharge from the hospital and arriving at the beach where he saw a navy ship that had the flag flying proudly, he felt it was not only beautiful but also *“healing in a lot of ways.”* The level of trustworthiness felt about this story would still be at a high level even without the Medal of Honor he received.

Luyen Nguyen—Part 2

Disappointment in our United States Government for what happened to Luyen Nguyen for 21 years is an understatement. Because the U.S. knew that sending the South Vietnamese soldiers into North Vietnam as a mission was almost guaranteed to fail, it

leaves a sense of disgust and distrust. He describes the U.S. advisers in that operation as arrogant, that they lived above the law. It is disheartening that specific details like that are so easily recalled after so many years. Recognizing that many of our troops, commanders etc. didn't want to be in Vietnam—or better yet, knew nothing about Vietnam before being sent there—makes it all the more difficult to comprehend that something so inhumane was the outcome for some of the people during that time. It felt like an elusive set up from the beginning as he tells his story—“*no way the CIA could be so stupid*” and he too believed it was a planned failure, yet he complied. How terrifying to be dropped somewhere knowing that the people you were with had no idea of the danger and joked around as if they were “*on their way to school.*” Luyen amazingly kept his loyalty to his Army during that entire imprisonment.

Although his story captivates and solidifies disappointment in our Government, there is a deepening sense of compassion for the Vietnamese where there wasn't before simply because of a knowledge deficit. For Luyen death may have come knocking numerous times, but the losses he continues to live with—time, missed years of growing children, etc.—can never be replaced. This too is another type of casualty from The Vietnam War. The ultimate outcome of reunification with his family, albeit so many years later, leaves a feeling of hope and satisfaction after a disheartening story of loss on so many levels.

Part 1

Ta Quang Thinh's story was very impactful for two major reasons. One is because he sustained a permanently debilitating injury. The other is due to his understanding of how people around him viewed the war. Thinh was in South Vietnam as a doctor's aide in 1965. When he went to check up on a postoperative patient whose blood pressure was lowering, they were hit by a bomb. The roof collapsed onto Thinh and five other people, breaking his back and paralyzing him from the waist down. To realize that this man had to live the rest of his life as a paraplegic because he went to help somebody is just heart breaking. At the end of his story he says that his wife visits him once a year. Even to this day he is separated from his wife because of what happened over 40 years ago. Of course, after being injured, he was sick of the war. However, he also believes that everyone else abhorred the war equally as much, mentioning that on top of the numerous casualties, the people's savings, houses, plants, animals, hopes and dreams were all wasted by a tragic war. While this true to some extent, people like Vo Nguyen Giap, fought willingly, seeing it as a "noble sacrifice" rather than a tragedy. Thinh is certainly biased in his view of the war. After experiencing something so traumatic first-hand, how could anyone not be? A witness can only look at an event through their eyes, whereas another person can analyze the event from multiple angles with the eyes of several witnesses. Regardless, the sadness, loss, and pain that he endured were, and still are, absolutely real.

Part 2

The story told by Daniel Redmond sheds light on one of the several disappointing events of the war. Innocent Vietnamese people from the north side were brought to the south simply because of their religion. They were viewed as a foundation on which to raise up an anticommunist state. Leaving everything they knew behind, they were sprayed with DDT (to kill lice) and shoved onto huge ships that would take them to South Vietnam. They weren't soldiers, they were simple villagers, sisters, brothers, grandfathers, and mothers. One woman even gave birth completely on her own, bit off the umbilical cord and rinsed the baby in the river. It seems that those in power, didn't fully understand the consequences to their decisions. American presidential advisors and French diplomats could possibly grasp what the civilians and troops alike, would be forced to live through. As the Vietnamese people boarded the ships, they saw signs that said "Your path to freedom," but they were not being 'set free', they were being used to gain a political edge against the communist north; which was oppressive only in the eyes of the Americans.

Although the war was extremely hard on everyone involved, there are a few encouraging stories that took place in Vietnam during the confusion and chaos. Rufus Phillips shares about Americans who built friendships with the Vietnamese, gained their trust, and built up their confidence. Rufus worked for a man named Landsdale, who was told to "Save South Vietnam". They lived with the Vietnamese people, respected their culture and helped them as best they could, even if that meant refusing to hire them. When Vietnamese asked if they could work for Landsdale he would say, "Well, I don't want you to work for us. You should be working to help your government...you aren't an agent of the United States." It's seemingly small situations like this one that established trust

between the Vietnamese and American people. Even though Viet Minh propaganda portrayed American troops as rapists and thieves, the exceptional behavior and continuous acts of kindness eventually won the hearts of the people. After a couple months, the villagers began greeting the troops and offering water. It's amazing that even during such a depressingly misunderstood part of history, people can bring a glimpse of hope.

Assignment 1

Part1:

Roger Donlon stood out to me right away. The fact that he was the very first American to receive the Medal of Honor in that particular war is a very important memorable achievement. His story, among others, involved putting their own serious injuries aside to save and protect others. Not everyone is capable of such heroism. "What keeps you going at times like that is the love you feel for your fellow teammates". He had somebody die in his arms. I am sure there were probably others he did not even mention in his story. I found it interesting that when they were relocating populations, about 1/3 of them were actually "sympathizing with the enemy" unbeknownst to Donlon and his men. When he quoted, "we were babes in arms in every way" it really says a lot. Not only do I think that was a statement regarding that specific situation of naivety - but the war as a whole that had so many very young drafted or enlisted men.

I feel that Roger Donlon provided truthful unbiased recollections. Although he was good at expressing emotion to a certain degree regarding his time there- it did not seem to veer from factual information. His emotion did not seem to take away any validity of the history. In my opinion he was very credible and touched base on important matters in a descriptive intelligent manor.

Part 2:

Daniel Redmond's story made me sad right away. I share Redmond's disappointment toward the U.S. for being a good thing at one time, only to do absolute harm to that country ten years later. The U.S. was repeating similar things that the French did. I agree that "we should've just supported the South Vietnamese financially and stayed the hell out of there." We went from having a president who wanted to help them, to having a president with a complete opposite agenda.

With what Redmond was describing, I felt awful for the Vietnamese refugees when they were evacuated and relocated in the 1950's. They were so scared and out of place. I was shocked to read about a woman giving birth to a baby unassisted, only to bite off the umbilical cord and rinse the baby off in the river. Such raw, disturbing things happen that are almost unfathomable to a person such as myself who has lived in comfort and safety my entire life. Although it was tough on the refugees to evacuate, Redmond was proud because they were helping them. He seemed to be a very compassionate, empathetic person. It is nice to discover the good in people along the way who care for one another after hearing such negative things about war. Redmond expressed his care for the Vietnamese and went from being proud of what the U.S. was doing there, to complete opposition by the time the 1960's came around. It is very interesting how much things

can change in just a few years.

Another person I took interest to was Deirdre English. It was a change of pace from just hearing from members of the war and stories taking part outside of the United States. Deirdre sounded like a very bright high school student from back during that time. She had so many questions she needed answers to- once discovering the existence of Vietnam. She recognized that it wasn't being talked about as much as it should with the importance it truly held. I am very disappointed that as a highschooler during that time, she had no idea about the war, let alone the existence of that country at all. I was asking myself the same things she asked: Why weren't the teachers and other adults at that time caring enough to bring awareness about something so important involving our country? Awareness obviously still needed spread at that time and that is what she took part in.

Deirdre discovered a passion regarding the war and ended up working really hard to make a difference with her demonstrations. A good thing in a negative situation such as any war is the people along the way who try to make a difference. People who stand up in a time of turmoil without fear to say when something isn't right and to stand united. It shows that we have hope in humanity at even the hardest times. Vietnam war made such an impact on Deirdre and shaped what her career ended up being later on as an investigative journalist, focusing on that war as well as women's history.

Steven Masone

History 195 Vietnam War F14
Escobar Assignment 1

PT.1

Geo

rge Watkins

George Watkins story was both painful and inspirational for me. I taught Jungle Warfare at J.O.T.C. (Jungle Operations Training Center) in Panama 1973-1975. 80% of my unit were combat veterans that made it out. We were still sending men into Laos and Cambodia. My immediate platoon Sergeant did three tours. Until I received treatment after I got out for PTSD and a jungle virus, I was not exposed to the wounded and maimed vets who could have been George Watkins. His attitude and perseverance is amazing. I currently work with disabled and homeless veterans from all campaigns. George's injuries were such that I find it hard to believe he was that conversant and upbeat as the interview portrays. When George said, "That sand was probably the only thing that saved me." ...made me see it was his own courageous "Sand" that inspires many. "All gave some...some gave all!"

PT. 2

SERG

EI KHRUSHCHEV

Of all the stories in part 2... I am most disappointed with this one. Appy does qualify Sergei's subjectivity when he points out the reverence the son has for his father as a great leader. However, I find it too much to bear seeing Sergei come to this country and profit from the freedoms his father wanted to destroy as I remember the threat: "We will bury you" and not putting any responsibility on his father for the blood of our fallen. Perhaps somewhere he acknowledges his father's blood lust, it should have been reflected here if so.

Without commenting on another story in particular I found the stories of the State Department and CIA rekindling old resentments that "desk jockeys and bureaucrats" were a major problem for many KIA's and casualties resulting from inept and sloppy intel as much as the misguided strategy and political corruption were culpable. However, Paul Kattenburg's quote; "What's good for Peru is good for Vietnam."....epitomized the idiocy of what caused other bloody incursions in Chile and Panama to name just a couple.

Tim Hammett

Assignment #1

History of Vietnam War

Part 1: George Watkins

Out of all the stories I have read so far this one has had the biggest impact for me so far not just in the story that is being told about the war but the way in which Mr. Watkins has dealt with it. He was told he would be an engineer but was then put into infantry and subjected to sleepless days where he would then lose the use of both his eyes and legs. It could have turned any man bitter but he doesn't talk about hating anyone he says the Vietnamese were "some of the most determined people I've ever run into. I don't hate them. They did what they had to do." Something about this man's ability to go through so much after being drafted and come out of it the way he did seems profound to me. As far as his reliability as a source of information Tim O'Brien would say that in the telling of any war story a bit of the truth is lost but overall I think that Mr. Watkins is a pretty reliable narrator. The thing that I think also makes him a reliable narrator is it does not seem like he has any huge biases in play either for or against the Vietnamese and if he has bias at all it is against the politicians that he blames for causing the conflict. After viewing the videos online and having my own preconceived notions on the conflict it is easier to view America as the evil empire and Vietnam as righteous freedom fighters but stories like this remind of the fact it was just people on both sides doing what they thought was right. It highlights the moral grey area that both sides existed in with the tactics they used to accomplish their goals.

Part 2: Daniel Redmond

This story was most disappointing to me because it highlighted just how fundamentally wrong the western powers were in going about to try and halt communism in Vietnam. I would like to point out that I am aware that hindsight is 20/20 so I shouldn't be too harsh but some of things highlighted in the story are hard to view as productive in any way for what they were trying to accomplish. The Americans and French seemed to notice the importance of winning local support as showcased by them helping close to a million Catholic Vietnamese relocate south but at the same time they do this the French are reported as treating them like cattle. When you add to this things like the signs being written on the boat that most people couldn't read and the book Deliver Us from Evil that Dooley wrote and the false hoods it contained such as the picture of the beggar. It just seems like Americans trying to put a nice spin on a not so pretty picture. All of this seems to showcase that the western powers involved didn't really seem to comprehend the importance of the Vietnamese nationalistic spirit that had been awakened and vastly underestimated.

If there is a bright side to this story it would have to be that we did do some good while we were in Vietnam even if it doesn't outweigh the damage. Getting those people to the south very well might have saved many of their lives. On a much more personal level we can see at the end in the final paragraph how Daniel's views have changed and softened over time. It is bitter sweet though knowing that despite the work the United States did in an attempt to help South Vietnam it was ultimately futile in grand scheme of things. In a point in U.S history where it seems much more likely to hear about the horrors that went on in the conflict it is nice seeing at least an attempt to help the general populace.

Zach Embree

10-11-14

History of the Vietnam War

Part 1

The most striking tale in this first section was the story of George Watkins. There are multiple reasons for this but, the primary one is not the horrific injuries he suffered. No what makes this tale stand out among the rest is that it peels back the comforting fictions our nation cloaks our conflicts with and reveals the uncomfortable truth about the price Vietnam cost our country. This account of “a grunt with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade” is unique in that it is not the viewpoint of a well-educated professor or a retired officer that has some lingering patriotic loyalty to the military; it is the tale of an average man caught up in a global conflict. Most of all this is a simple man, it comes through in his speech, grammar, and straightforwardness about what he did and why. He even asks the interviewer to “pretty up” his speech. While there is almost certainly a bias in his account it is refreshingly free of justification and double talk even compliments the people and tells us who he blames, the politicians. That gives him both boots on the ground experience that appears completely genuine. While the account is spotty on some details what he does remember is very factual and speaks of firsthand experience, not second stories filter through his perception. This account however is definitely not to be taken as universal for all of the men sent to Vietnam; however several points stick out when combined with our other material and even other interviews from the text. It is those points which make this one of the more interesting accounts. One point is the gorilla nature of the fighting and threat. In the text this means there are no grand battles, just a groups of men run down in the jungle at night. His own injury was not on a battlefield, but simply checking for hidden mines as they had to do daily. Secondly there are very clear indications that to the level of an infantry grunt this is a fight against not nations or people but the idea of communism. That’s what he was told was the enemy. When combined with the explanations in the other textbook this story reveals just how deeply that penetrated military thinking.

Part 2

The tale of our war with Vietnam was never going to be a happy subject, no great cause, no black and white, and a bitter ending. That being said two of the stories in the latter part of the reading were particularly disappointing for different reasons. The interview with Paul Kattenburg was a bitter tale in particular because of what it reveled about the thought process of the higher echelons of our government. It paints a picture of ignorance of social and economic realities when it describes Rostow’s belief that his policies could be enacted despite the decades of similar failures and when the “New Frontier” acted like they “knew all the answers”. As the text points out the French had tried all the method the United States was shoveling money into for decades and they had been met with total failure. This kind of complete failure when lives are on the line by what is supposed to be the problem solvers and policy makers is incredibly

disheartening. Their failures to accept the obvious facts of the matter because of what can only be assumed as political motivations and unsupported biases cheapens the deaths of the men forced over there. Not only that it makes every account of the failure of the government during the conflict even more intolerable, honest mistakes are expected, ignorance of the area of your responsibility is inexcusable. The second story which was a bleak reading is the interview given by Sergei Khrushchev. This was not hard to read because of personal tragedies but because it puts into words all the mistakes the United States had about the global situation. And with these mistakes the whole of the US involvement is all the more revealed as a grave misstep. One of the main reasons that the United States became interested in the area and what drove continued involvement was containing communism, especially after China was united under Mao. Yet what Sergei reveals is that there never was a massive united block of communists straining to flood the area with Soviet troops. He even quotes his father saying that if push came to shove they were going to back off so it did not turn into another Cuban Missile Crisis. Another assumption was that Ho and the northerners were taking orders from and were pawns of Moscow and Beijing. This is dismissed as a fantasy, they provided aid but were not making decisions, as he said "the Vietnamese had their own plans", mainly independence. Taken together that means we spent billions of dollars and thousands of lives, both ours and Vietnamese for what? In the end we left with nothing gained against a threat that never existed, and that is the most saddening realization of all.

Despite the nature of the material there are definitely some brighter points and lessons to be learned. One point that is both uplifting and a testament to the strength of the human spirit is the tales of some of the Vietnamese peasants and soldiers. In the first part of the reading is the tale of a southern Vietnamese soldier, who cares enough about an older couple to try to make sure they get to safety out of a free fire zone. He could have been shot at any time and had no relations with these people, but he goes calls them uncle and even goes again when they come back. Why, it seems because he cared about his people even in a war zone. Many of the tales in this book speak negatively of the Vietnamese soldiers fighting for the Diem government; however one story if tragic showed both unbreakable loyalty and deep compassion. That story is of a soldier captured on a commando mission. Went even if it was near suicide out of loyalty to his country and to make sure his men did not desert. Even eleven years in solitary did not turn him. As for compassion, he was willing to forgo contact with his wife and some kind of emotional connection in a literal hellhole so she would not have to grieve longer. And when she did find out she immediately went back to waiting for him. That is a kind of self-sacrifice that is truly inspirational.