

Throughout reading part three of the book, Patriots, the theme that stuck out to me was that the American soldiers went in with a sense that they were fighting for their country but came back with heavy hearts and regrets as well as the inability to show any emotion due to their pride. The Vietnamese soldiers however, seemed to believe they were fighting for something worthwhile and while it was heart wrenching to think back to their time spent battling and the good, honest, innocent people who were killed in the line of duty, it seems as though they understand the reason for the war and their minds don't seem to be altered no matter what tragedies took place. In plain terms, the Americans seem to be convincing themselves they were over there fighting for freedom while the Vietnamese don't need any convincing. They knew what they were fighting for and believed in their country and their people.

The story of Jim Soular, Free-Fire Zone, was one of the stories that were a good example of my chosen theme. Jim was a patriot as he states in the beginning of his story. He had always believed in the flag and serving his country and was someone the military could definitely count on. He went to Vietnam willingly as a flight engineer and made his helicopter his ultimate priority. He remembered accounts of pilots who would lose confidence in their helicopters but he would always be there to tell them it would be okay and instill the confidence back into them to allow everyone to safely arrive at their destination. He always stood behind the decisions of his fellow soldiers as well as the military until his best friend David was shot by another GI, Harris, who decided to take his drunken rage to the next level and shot David in the face. David died right in front of Jim and from that point on Jim's thoughts of serving his country and doing the right thing was slightly altered. The military sentenced Harris to five years of hard labor because Harris admitted he had been drunk when he shot David however, for another GI that was unauthorized to fly helicopters but did so in an attempt to try to save the chopper and failed ended up getting a sentence of fifteen years. Jim could not get a grasp on the fact that a machine was worth more than a soldier serving his country. He expressed his deep sorrow for going into Vietnam and doing so much damage to a country that we could have learned from rather than going in and destroying so much of it over circumstances that were out of his control. He left me with a sense of regret and extreme sadness because deep down I know he

wishes he could take it all back yet, he's stuck reliving it every day of his life.

The story of Vu Thi Vinh, *Trails to War*, was a good example of the hardships and risks the people of Vietnam were willing to face in order to win the war against the Americans. She was a teenager who volunteered for four years of her life to work in the jungles of Truong Son clearing the path of trees, damming up streams and filling bomb craters as quickly as possible to ensure their troops could make it through the Ho Chi Minh trail during the night. She explained that they would work all through the night to ensure their soldiers could make it safely through and without causing any traffic jams or that could allow the Americans a perfect opportunity to bomb and cause a massive amount of deaths. She doesn't express a lot of sadness or regret in her tone, she more just goes through the notions of what it took to be a youth volunteer and the environment that she subjected to because of her willingness to be part of the war because it meant fighting for her country. She focuses on her experience and their ability to find the pride in what they were doing for their country rather than dwelling on the war itself and the tragedies that came with it. She never put her country down or expresses any type of hostility towards Vietnam which left to believe that she has pure love for her country and will stand behind it no matter what the cost which does not seem the case for many American soldiers.

The story of Charles Cooper, "You want me to start World War III," showed how much LBJ was set in his ways about continuing the war the way he wanted to rather than attempting alternative approaches to possibly get the American troops out of Vietnam and end it altogether. Charles did not go back to a memory of being in Vietnam, but rather a memory of being in Lyndon B Johnson's Oval Office and realizing the President of the United States of America invited his five senior military advisers to come to a briefing only to ridicule any thoughts or ideas they had to end the war. Charles remembered the President cursing at them and treating them like they knew nothing and had no ground for their ideas. This really made me think that if the President who everyone had so much respect for could not even show respect to people who served under him and were the men responsible for following his commands and answering to his soldiers, how were the American soldiers out there fighting for their country supposed to feel? It seems as though the President could not admit defeat. This ultimately caused many of the American soldiers in Vietnam to be haunted by their actions and cut off from their emotions while not feeling pride at all, but sorrow instead for what they had done, leaving them to relive their memories of who they were and what they did while they were over there.

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