

Last edited: Saturday, 14 April 2012, 11:52 PM (849 words)

Brandy Morales

HST 195

April 14, 2012

Assignment #1

The book *Patriots: The Vietnam War remembered from all sides* has many heart wrenching stories. The subject material is a volatile subject in American History and one would expect for the accounts of the countless individuals touched by this event to produce visceral emotion. In the first part of the book "Introductions" many stories conjure up powerful emotions. The account of George Watkins is particularly poignant despite its seemingly simple relation. The plight of a poor young man drafted and thrust into a war with little training demands empathy. He stated early in his story " I knowed very little about Vietnam... I just knowed that we was fighting over there against Communism" (Appy p.22) This blatant honesty about his confusion over the overall mission lends him credibility because he was not putting on airs, he was confused and has no qualms about admitting it which portrays him as honest. When referring to his enemy he stated "They's some of the most determined people I've ever run into. I don't hate them. They did what they had to do" (Appy p.23). His lack of animosity towards his enemy is commendable and makes his story stand out from the others in the section as did his simple, straight forward telling of an event that altered his entire being. It made one feel for this human being and his plight. It is Watkins simplicity that lends him credibility. Many other stories feel like they are being polished up to show the speaker in a better light. Watkins telling of the events that caused him to be blind and a double amputee for the rest of his life does not do this.

While many stories in the book are uplifting or sad, some don't inspire such noble emotions. Many of the stories portray a level of ignorance, cruelty, and greed that are foul in every sense of the word. For the most part many stories in the second part of the book

called

"Beginnings (1945-64)" are quite unacceptable. Particularly disappointing was the display of the profound ignorance and fool hardiness of many individuals in our government. Many if not all, recounts of President Johnson represent him as an badly informed, prideful man and nearly every account of Secretary McNamara was negative in nature. Two stories that seem the most credible and the most condemning of our government actions were actually written by individuals working for the government in some official capacity. Paul Kattenburg relayed events in his story that are very disappointing and have a ring of truth that is impossible to deny. He stated in his recollection of his fateful National Security Council meeting "What struck me more than anything was just the abysmal ignorance around the table of the particular facts of Vietnam... It was robot thinking about Communism"(Appy p. 82). Despite his familiarity with the Vietnam situation and his many reports on the true undeniable facts about the atmosphere in Vietnam he was ignored and despite his professional opinion to withdraw the National Security Council decided to proceed. Evelyn Colbert worked for the Southeast Asia Division of the Bureau of Intelligence Research related in her story that despite cold hard facts government officials continued to plow ahead with the Vietnam debacle. She stated " McNamara now says we didn't know anything about Vietnam and what was really happening was not understood. That's a lot of garbage. We would come out with papers showing that things were going very badly indeed." (Appy p.83). The blindness of our government to logic and statistical evidence that could have been used to prevent waste of lives and funds is by far the most disappointing aspect of Part two.

There is always a silver lining. Although many of the stories portray a negative side of the individuals involved in the war there are examples of good intentions and goodness. Henry Prunier was one of the first Americans to be involved in Vietnams. He was part of the teams that went into Vietnam near the end of World War II to train the Vietnamese including Ho Chi Minh. His portrayal of the initial interactions between America and Vietnam showed a possibility had once existed of peace between our two nations. Most profound was the recount was the way Ho Chi Minh was initially viewed. Prunier related " At one point someone asked him(Ho Chi Minh) directly if he was a Communist and he said, 'Yes, I'm a

Communist, but there's no reason why we can't be friends, why we can't live together.'"
(Appy p.40). This willingness to accept and desire to be accepted could have prevented many years of war, countless deaths, and billions of dollars wasted. The ability to live and let live would displayed in this recount of the early years shows the good intentions that failed to come to fruition.

Close this window

 [Moodle Docs for this page](#)