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History of Vietnam

Assignment #1

George Watkins

Though this is one of the smaller vignettes in this section, it packs a powerful wallop. Upon reading it, it is easy to see the need to scrape one's heart off the floor. How could one possibly imagine the environment by which these young men were surrounded? For days on end, they watched their buddies, their comrades, get shot down, or blown apart their lives destroyed before their very eyes. Maybe Mr. Watkins was unable to articulate the relief of his personal tragedy rather than the survival guilt that many other soldiers seem to wrestle with.

Perhaps the most striking part of Watkins' account, is his lack of anger. He stated on page 24, "I don't have much bitterness. Well, I don't think I do. I just wish that none of it ever happened-for everybody's sake." How can a person make a statement like that who couldn't see and couldn't walk? There are more questions than answers in his story and that is why his experience leaves the strong imprint that it does. He seemed like a gentle, simple, unassuming character who had dealt with unimaginable grief yet he sat in an interview claiming that he wasn't angry.

How could this story not be reliable? It is hard to imagine that the details of such a horrific event could ever be blurred. Usually the most poignant events in one's life remain crystal clear. In this instance, there is hope for blurred detail. Hope that more went into choosing who joined the infantry other than a line drawn through a list of names. Hope that maybe he got more infantry training than he remembered. Credibility is a tricky subject. Does it matter in this case? And in what capacity? A person can have a physical experience at one time and as he begins to process what happened, that experience changes as his emotions change. Maybe his perception can change as well. None of this should diminish his credibility because it was still his experience.

Richard Olsen

Mr. Olsen starts out star-struck about this war and working with war heroes. Is there anything to be star-struck about? One can be a patriot, a lover of this country, and proud to be an American without glorifying war. War happens. War is necessary, but isn't there a better way to express accomplishments rather than idolizing them? The way he spoke of flying over Vietnam as romantic is hard to grasp. He had a "let me show you how it's done"

sort of attitude which is a revolting part of any ego in most circumstances let alone "gunning down" another human being.

The last italicized paragraph in Mr. Olsen's account seems to come full circle. First he was struck with fear of drowning and his own mortality. On page 64 he made the comment, "I survived the war and here I am getting drowned as a tourist!" A different cord of fear struck again when the Vietnamese man showed up in front of him which was followed by immediate peace. They looked through each other's eyes into one another's souls. Beautiful! It shows that the most viscous and inexplicable tragedy can be overcome even without words. Even if it was just in the heart of a sole pilot.

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