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History of Vietnam Assignment One

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In part 1 of the text *Patriots*, the narrative of Tran Thi Gung made an impact due to an honest portrayal of warfare, by a soldier in the field, specifically a female soldier, fighting for the Viet Cong near Chu Chi. A point-of-view many American's would not be aware of. Tran Thi Gung in her opening paragraph explains what initially motivated her to join the Viet Cong cause, the Vietnamese government, 'puppets of the American's as she described them executed her father, and she immediately swore revenge.

The narration is both believable and objective, as Tran Thi Gung didn't get wrapped up in ideology, explaining who is right or wrong, is Communism or Capitalism more important? She admits immediately why she joined the guerrillas, her father was killed and her people are dying, so she is fighting and killing to survive. She also gave the author visual confirmation of her combat experience with a photo dating back to 1966, by combat photographer Duong Thanh Phong. In the photo, she is lying on the ground aiming a rifle. It could be 'assumed' that despite the war being over three decades ago, her memories remain fresh as she admits that each time somebody asks about her experience as a soldier, she relives the traumatic event during the night in a nightmare.

Tran Thi Gung's account of the war reveals to the reader that those who fight (and kill or get killed) in the field, can have vastly different motivations than their leaders who start and control the war. The leaders want victory, demanding a certain prevailing outcome, whether the war is motivated by ideology, resources or prestige, the grunt or soldier is killing, just to stay alive. The war was justified because it was about defending yourself and your companions from an invading force, regardless of their reasons. She boldly admits she is justified in killing countless Americans, not because one side or the other is right or wrong, but because it's her home, and the Americans are invading, therefore she's going to kill

them until they're gone. Tran Thi Gung would expect no different, if she and her friends invaded America, it's your homeland and you have a duty to protect from foreign invasion.

In Part 2 of *Patriots*, the head of the State Department 's Vietnam Task Force (in 1963), Paul Kattenburg gives a disappointing account of one of many reasons why the war went so badly for the United States, pure ignorance of Vietnam and it's culture. Kattenburg gives short, but concise details explaining the problems he observed at a National Security Council executive meeting in August, 1963. His observation retold in the text informs the reader how oblivious to facts the American architects of the Vietnam War were being, having little or no knowledge of the enemy they assumed they could beat. The members of the Security Council were idealistically determined to win the war, believing they had the sheer firepower to win the war, not willing to lose regardless of the costs (of lives or money). Despite paperwork and reports from the field in Vietnam saying otherwise, individuals like Vice-President Johnson, Secretary of State Rusk and Deputy Special Assistant Rostow ignored Kattenburg, all refused to listen to any conversation that was remotely negative!

Unwilling to listen to an alternative answer for how to proceed in Vietnam (such as leaving, in Kattenburg's opinion), along with nobody in the room having any kind of cultural (or even language) expertise on Vietnam is one of the many reasons the war in Vietnam was so devastating for the United States. It was the longest war to date, many Americans were recorded not even knowing where Vietnam was on a global map, forcing President Johnson having to explain 'Why Vietnam' in the recorded video explaining to the public, why was it so important we had to fight and win in Vietnam. But we lost, for the first time ever, to a Third World country.

The conversation Kattenburg had, which eventually cost him his position, was one of the factors why we lost the war, going into a situation immediately after observing the French losing despite their resources and technology. The United States assumed Communist North Vietnam could be beaten in a matter of months, with no idea of who we were fighting, and how long they had been willing to resist invading forces, over and over again, China, France, Japan, France and the United States. As observers of history, we know that Kattenburg's story rings true, as similar stories could be read in *Patriots*, such as U.S. State

Department employee Evelyn Colbert's recollection, who knew first hand that the analysts and 'experts' were well aware that the U.S. was being far more optimistic about victory and Vietnamese enthusiasm then they led on.

The over estimation of U.S. power against a Third World country can't be underestimated, as similar problems can currently be observed with the current war in Afghanistan (another nation which has defended itself successfully against much larger world powers).

The testimony of Luyen Nguyen however, was an example that despite the countless lives lost in war and devastation, those who lived through the confrontation can eventually heal and find happiness. Luyen Nguyen was a South Vietnamese commando who was captured, tortured and a prisoner of North Vietnam for twenty-one years. In that time, the war ended and his wife eventually expecting he was dead, remarried. In 1987 Luyen Nguyen was released and found his family, including his wife (who immediately divorced her second husband) and began trying to recover the lost years of his life. The commando forces that Luyen Nguyen were compensated by the United States and he and his wife eventually moved to the U.S. and he became a professor of the University of Massachusetts.

Throughout his entire ordeal, one would have to ask who does Luyen Nguyen harbor hatred or resent for after so much of his life was stolen from him? The Communists who captured and stole over twenty years of his life? The United States for sending him into a disastrous situation, that he knew (and so did the U.S. agents that picked him) he was guaranteed to be killed or captured?

Instead Luyen Nguyen chose to make up for lost time, spending time with his family, and moved away from the painful memories in his own country to the United States. In the United States, despite how the country may have treated him earlier as an 'ally', not only did he move there, but became a professor of American studies, studying and teaching to the very country who probed him into losing so much of his life. Luyen Nguyen's story did show that despite the harm that can never be reversed in war, life can pick up and get better.

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