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Assignment 1

Part 1

The story I chose for part one is a recollection of the early offensives between the United States and the North Vietnamese by Dang Vu Hiep. I chose this for particular story for a couple reasons. First, I must admit, I hadn't really looked ahead prior to the reading assignments nor had I examined the book closely at all. I was not expecting accounts from the North Vietnamese. I was intrigued and my interest was definitely piqued as I began to read. The second reason is Hiep's nonchalant attitude towards claims made by American personnel after the war was over. He recounts McNamara as claiming that without the attack on Pleiku the United States never would have begun the systematic bombing of North Korea and asserts that they find this claim to be "groundless." His entire attitude towards the war isn't one of malice but more one that is born of necessity based in the views that he had a job to do and regardless of what the job entailed he would do it. I do find Hiep to be credible, however, not necessarily the most accurate of sources. His subjectivity is clear and his dismissal attitude towards information given by the opposition after the war is evidence of that. He also continues to refer to the North Vietnamese as

“we.” Even when recounting events that occurred after the war he still says “we,” despite the fact that there was no more “we.” This immediately makes me wary of his ability to succumb to facts and reason and makes him appear steadfast in his view that “we” were right and “they” were wrong. Such unwavering viewpoints make me apprehensive of how slanted his views on actual occurrences probably are. I don’t believe that time and forgetfulness are a factor but I do believe the more time that passes the more people will only remember what they want to remember. All in all I greatly appreciated his recollections of events and the perspective he provided as throughout my lifetime most perspective I have heard is from American soldiers.

Part 2

The story that disappointed me the most was Rufus Phillips’. His attitude was completely machismo and there was a feeling of arrogance running throughout. To assert that not only did he and his cohorts present a plan that would have worked in Vietnam but also that his work in the region was impeccable and his interactions with the Vietnamese army were so effective that had America not pulled out they eventually would have been victorious, rubs me the wrong way. His egotism is rampant and, while I have no other information on Phillips, I find it very hard to believe that his role in this war was so paramount that an entire victory in a region could have been catalyzed by his actions. He also had a very dismissive tone towards all interactions with the Vietnamese population which only fed more into my beliefs that he is an egomaniac.

I found Richard Olsen's account of being a pilot during the war to have many positive aspects. It reminded me that not everyone in Vietnam was shivering in the jungle scared for their lives. It also showed me that many soldiers had indeed volunteered for service and viewed the war as a rite of passage just as WWII and Korea had been for the generation before them. I hadn't read, or heard of, too many accounts of soldiers who were willing participants in the conflict. It reminded me of the benefits of being an enlisted man, the camaraderie with the fellow soldiers and the ability to see parts of the world, which prior to the war, never really seemed to exist to them. While the undertones of the story were rife with accounts of mistreatment of South Vietnamese the overall feeling was reminiscent of stories from WWII, or wars that lack the negative connotations that immediately come to mind when I think of Vietnam.

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