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Assignment 1: Patriots - The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides by Christian Appy

Tran Thi Gung's story caught my attention because she was a woman fighting in a very dangerous war. Americans did not have many active women in the military, and they certainly weren't on the frontlines. Gung's courage and commitment to her country allowed her to fight alongside men, all fighting for one cause. This showed how badly the Vietnamese wanted to win their independence. So much so, they were allowing anyone to fight for their country that wanted to. I believe Gung's accounts of the war were true. Her matter fact way of telling her story reveals a sense of confidence and commitment to her country. Plus there is a photograph of her with her rifle in hand and lying in the trenches, taken by combat photographer Duong Thanh Phong. Her accounts of the war come across reliable and believable. She tells of the different war tactics they used and how easy it was to kill the Americans. The intricate details of the underground tunnels gave a clear picture at how the Vietnamese fought the war. I think too often we only hear one side of the story of war, our side. Often the media will share heroic American stories in order to gain support for a war. This story shows the opposing side of the war that most Americans did not hear about during and after the war. Being thrown in the middle of war does not mean you have a better understanding of it, but a different view on why and who you are fighting. This woman was a credible witness to what it was like for her, in her country, fighting her war. Her story was very factual and told she told it in a very matter-of-fact way, which I respected. But there was also an underlying

sadness and you knew she had been through and seen a lot of horrific things.

I wouldn't call my feelings for Malcolm Browne's *story* disappointing, but the actions of the South Vietnam government, police, Catholics and the anti-Buddhist's was disappointing. I have read many books and studied Buddhism extensively, it is a very peaceful and non-violent religion. And Browne portrayed them as such with his accounts. And they were being forced to switch to Catholicism and to follow a ruler they did not believe in. How could we expect a nation to do that when America was founded because we didn't want to follow British rule and religion? Then Browne went back to visit Vietnam in 1994 and met with some of the monks he knew, and they said that they were being treated as poorly under Communist rule as they were under Diem's rule. So the Communists and Ho Chi Minh supporters got their independence, a lot of the Catholic Vietnamese got to escape to America, and the Buddhists stayed in an anti-Buddhist country and continued to be persecuted. Here is one group of people that got cheated out of their freedom of religion and way of life before, during, and after the Vietnam War.

I liked Richard Olson's story because he didn't just talk about destruction and mayhem. He was hopeful and optimistic; and described that his mindset was in "romantic mode" and that he was "enthusiastic". Up until this point in the book, most of the people's outlooks on the war were grim and they expressed mostly dissatisfaction with foreign policy and had negative attitudes about wartime. So this was an uplifting story on a young man's journey as a pilot and living in a war torn country. I looked up some of his artwork, and some of it is pretty dark and abstract. But I like that he used painting as an outlet for his emotions, it seemed like a good way for him to express his thoughts and feelings about the war.

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