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ASSIGNMENT 1

The story in Part 1 that particularly drew me in was Tran Thi Gung's account of guerilla warfare against the South, because of its firsthand narrative of a young person's struggle against yet another foreign power in her country. She tells matter-of-factly of her father's murder by the "puppet" soldiers, her subsequent enlistment with the guerillas at the age of seventeen, and her various engagements with the enemy. Talk of nationalist pride or the egotistical chest-thumping of a victorious soldier is refreshingly missing. She tells a simple story that illuminates the experience of fighting a technologically superior enemy with scant resources, using tactics that often confounded the South's conventional approach to combat, and living conditions in the cramped tunnels. I especially liked the part where she tells of capturing a man she knew from her own area. Admittedly, what little I knew about the Viet Cong came from Hollywood, and there was much to doubt about how they were depicted, but the fact that she wouldn't shoot the soldier because he was unarmed and had surrendered somehow surprised me. I know there is good and bad on both sides of war, but I discovered a latent feeling that the Viet Cong were not exactly cruel but less compassionate than us. Maybe even less human. Growing up with "Deer Hunter" and the like where the physical and psychological suffering of a generation of Americans is all too apparent, it's amazing to only now see objectively that such humanity and pain is not exclusively ours. I also appreciated the end when she expresses no guilt but a tremendous sadness at so much loss.

I can't pick a particular story that most disappointed me in Part 2, but what pervades most of the stories is the arrogance of American policy and its nearly complete ignorance of the people and cultures of Vietnam. Chester Cooper tells how no one in the American embassy spoke Vietnamese. Malcolm Browne says that, despite having a large Buddhist population, their insurrection came as a complete surprise. His wife, Le Lieu Browne, a civil servant, speaks of censorship of "politically sensitive" material from battlefield reports to dictionaries that included the word Communism, as well as describing the Diem government as corrupt and growing increasingly despotic. Paul Kattenburg relates how William Rostow, a special assistant for national security affairs, saw no difference between one country or another and treated them similarly. I find it difficult to believe anyone would believe these attitudes could win "hearts and minds", let alone how so many could espouse such views.

One thing that I found positive in this was the Brownes. I'm an incurable romantic, and I

liked that they met because it was her job to chastise him when he wrote something the government found objectionable, how they lived together even though it was illegal, and how they eventually married. Even in such an atmosphere as war, they, at least, can say something wonderful like love can come out of it.

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