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Assignment #1 - Reflections on testimonies from Part 1 and 2 of Patriots, The Vietnam War Remembered from all sides, by Christian G. Appy

From the moment I started reading Christian G. Appy's book as an assignment in this class, I knew that it would have a meaningful emotional impact on me. I tend to like reading from a first person narrative as opposed to a textbook format. This book has a fascinating element of discovery, and I believe a very necessary perspective from many different walks of life.

As a female reading about this war for the first time, I found that Tran Thi Gung (p. 15) had several portions of her testimony that stood out to me. There seemed to be a detached sense of humanity about her stories and depictions of events. Before reading her testimony I hadn't thought of the concept of Vietnamese women fighting in the trenches as "guerillas." In the very first paragraph of her account, it states that she wanted revenge for her fathers death. I believe this explains part of the reason her dedication to her cause was so fierce. She goes on to speak of how the Viet Cong knew that if they shot one American soldier there would be many more soldiers who would come to the wounded soldiers aid and the Viet Cong could shoot many more of the enemy. She called them "sitting ducks", especially when they cried over the body and mourned. She also speaks of her unit as conducting a death ceremony for her before she went on certain dangerous missions, for the sake of creating maps of the enemy camps and bases. There had to have been a huge psychological impact when her comrades spoke of her as if she were already dead (while she was standing there listening). By definition I believe she was a true patriot and very brave. She not only stepped out of traditional gender roles, she became known for her tenacity when doing so. I commend her for her honesty when she states in the last paragraph of her testimony that she does not feel guilty about killing Americans who came to her country to kill her.

"We were a cross between missionary heathen and a frontiersman who was building in the face of enemy attacks." This statement was from John Singlaub a former commander for SOG (p. 90). I was extremely disappointed in this testimony of the war. The account seems as if every paragraph was contradictory to subsequent ones. Just when he starts to make sense, it seems he goes off on another tangent that makes a person wonder if he is mentally capable of giving any statement that should be taken seriously. I found it interesting that he believed the Special Operations Group (SOG) was psychologically reforming the war in the North. He recounts how they tended to the Northern guerilla's or Viet Cong in a physical capacity and after doing so the SOG sent "generous" gift packages back with them to try to create a resistance or uprising. Instead, what transpired was the fact that they obtained double agents.

He goes on to say that he felt good about putting missionaries back into the North that had gotten a "taste" of something other than what the communists were putting out (keeping in mind that he also stated they were oftentimes captives). I believe, in this context doing exactly what the communists did. He explained that we helped the South Vietnamese (Anti-Communist Vietnamese) flee the North into a safer environment along with the aid of the Catholic church, and this is why the Shangri-La camp was set up. After all, we couldn't win the war if there were no resistance programs within the Northern region and nobody was there to rebel. Nobody that the unit placed into the North from this method of psychological warfare was expected to have an impact. However, he says "we had a good psychological program."

On the other hand, in John's two faced statement he says the media was biased. That people ended up wanting to come back to the war because they felt they were supported and fighting for a good cause, whereas in the US the morale was very low. Isn't this just what the military was wanting from, "Good soldiers" and the boost of morale on the front lines? Can't he see that it was not just the media that was biased, but the people that he was getting his information from that were also biased?

Again, I can't say that this particular story was a favorite of mine. He was very opinionated and not at all objective in his thoughts. I don't know that he has the ability to be objective. There is a great possibility that he was brainwashed at the same time he was trying to brainwash, "The enemy."

I do believe that some of the descriptions made regarding the strategies this unit used were accurate. There are other accounts that can confirm the validity of most of this information. From dropping pre-programmed transistor radio's, sending gift baskets, and tending to the Viet Cong physically, this is just one more way that the US misallocated funds in their great endeavor to win this war.

On a more positive note, I could tell he wasn't completely absorbed in what the military was saying and doing on points of topics he referenced. He does recount his request to discontinue the SOG program and tries to make sense in his mind of who and what went wrong in this war. Basically, I believe he is just another casualty of the war. Confusion is abundant, and quite possibly psychological damaged as well. It is not necessarily his fault, though, this just explains one more way in which our soldiers were trained and molded to fit the needs of our government. Insight is educational, and very important. I would rather be cognizant of these stories than be ignorant to them. This makes freedom great. As people we can access stories such as these, and make intelligent decisions based on this knowledge. Heck, we can even change our minds!

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