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Part 1

The story that caught my attention was that of George Watkins. I chose to write about his story because it is the only story from Part 1 that made me cry. I cried mostly because of Appy's commentary at the end: "On my way out, he makes a request I do not know how to honor: 'Fancy it up,' he says" (25). In a way, this added to the credibility of the story. I saw so much emotion in the way Watkins spoke, even though it was obvious he wasn't very well educated. I believe wholeheartedly that he had very little knowledge of what was going on in Vietnam; I know from my other readings that a lot of people didn't in the early days of the conflict. I am also a bit angry for him that the military trained him to be a combat engineer, but then threw him into the middle of battle without any battle training. I don't think it matters that so much time had passed since the war when he was telling Appy his story. He is factual and clear. However, I don't think it's possible to tell a story of that magnitude without a high level of subjectivity. Everybody perceives things in a way that makes sense to them. When Watkins visited the Memorial Wall, he asked the same question I've heard so many of my dad's generation ask: Why did all these people die? I know that there are people who believe we should have stayed the course and crushed Communism in Vietnam, but Watkins is part of the majority that wonders why, what was gained from it? The introduction to the first episode of the DVD series stated that Vietnam was the most widely protested war and left so much unresolved. It's tragic.

Part 2

It was hard to choose the most disappointing story, but I finally decided on the second to last story in the section. John Slinglaub's account of the "Sacred Sword of the Patriot League" left me with the same sick, empty feeling I had when I saw the movie *The Good Shepherd*. I was disgusted with the way the SOG manipulated the peasants of Vietnam, making them think there was a resistance with vast resources that toppled that of the Viet Minh. I understand that to win a war you must rally the support of the people affected by the war, but it was a dangerous game the SOG was playing with the minds of the people. It was more than just war propaganda films and posters; it was like Winston at the mercy of Big Brother, but without the physical torture. I was also annoyed that Slinglaub was critical of the media's representation of the U.S. presence in Vietnam. He thought he was a missionary, doing good works for the people and teaching them the salvation of democratic, capitalist free-thought—never mind that he boasted in the same tangent that they "slaughtered" the Viet Cong. American intervention was solidified by our encouraging a coup against Ngo Dinh Diem—even after we supported him. We do a lot of horrifying things during wartime in the name of doing good.

I found encouragement in Paul Kattenburg's story, though. Our only real example of

Communism in action was the Stalin regime. Communism under Stalin was evil, therefore Communism is evil. This fallacious syllogism caused mass panic in America. Kattenburg was a man who saw things clearly in this time of national panic. He looked past the Soviet Union looming in the north and saw an independent country with its own national pride, its own culture and history, and its own unyielding determination to truly be free. He saw unmistakably that the Viet Minh would fight as long and hard as it took to win their country back. He saw that it was a fight that America could not win. He saw that we did not have all the answers we thought we had. In a time of complete ignorant arrogance, Kattenburg was convinced we should just pull out of Vietnam “with honor” (82). I find it encouraging that in the midst of all the illogical foreign policy our country comes up with sometimes, there are a few good people who see the big picture.

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