

John Howland

(1096 words)

Assignment Two – Part One

The Turning Point

Philip Jones Griffiths

After reading through part four one story stood out, not because of length but because of the reality of human nature was laid bare. Philip described, in two short paragraphs, how the Viet Cong fooled the Americans into bombing District Eight in Saigon. District Eight was populated by those South Vietnamese who worked either in the government or had opened businesses that catered to the Americans that were in-country. Businesses that included bars, strip clubs and prostitution rings along with the resale of products that were traded for or purchased from the Americans. While in the states, Americans were tiring of the war, the South Vietnamese middle class were thriving off the American dollar. These Vietnamese tried to mimic the American middle class, and as Philip stated "they had big backyards and nice carved chairs". One can see this happen anytime an American outpost is set up, whether it is in another country or even in the US. Go by any American base and you'll find these scavengers on the outskirts. While there is necessity for certain support from the locals, there is also a large group of unnecessary businesses that pop up to drain the soldiers of their pay.

Yep! I keep thinking of that new Trans Am my Air Force cousin bought soon after he went to Colorado.

The Viet Cong simply used America's words, to these middle class Vietnamese, against them. After being told that they would be safe in the cities, it was the Americans who ended up bombing the area out of existence. These were the pro American Vietnamese, these people believed they would be safe; but in war is anyone really safe? Once you lose the only people who support you, even the ones who only support you because of the money they reap from your presence, what is left but the deaths of innocent people. We were in a country to stop the Communist from destroying it and we end up doing a better job at it. Not only did it wake up these people to the hard realities of waging a war in-country but it also disillusioned them to the government. It's not like they suddenly saw the war as being wrong, they just knew they were not safe anymore. Their big backyards were gone along with their fancy carved chairs. Gone was the safety they felt and gone was their support for the Americans. This was a major turning

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point for the South Vietnamese middle class and with that the possibility of any victory.

Assignment Two – Part Two

Ending

Steve Sherlock

Upon reading Steve Sherlock's story one begins to understand that the Vietnam War is just about over, and we lost. Here was an officer who believed, in the beginning, that he was fighting an honorable war. He thought that if we didn't stop the Communist, in Vietnam, we would be fighting them on our own shores. He felt that it was a noble cause and we were fighting an enemy, as he states, "the equivalent of the Nazis".

Reality started to fill his mind, when he went to Vietnam in 1968, and he began to realize that it was wrong for us to be there killing people. When he signed a "Fuck War" petition, at Camp Eagle, he was accused of betraying his duty by someone from Intelligence. Yet his impression of the Intelligence officer's mood was not confrontational and so he requested to be reassigned somewhere else. He was sent to an infantry platoon at a village called Nguoc Ngot near Danang. On the first night he was ordered to set up an ambush at the end of the village; when one of his squad leaders opened fire, because he had heard something, seven people were killed and three prisoners captured. For this he was awarded the Bronze Star medal; something that became meaningless instead of an honor because they were given out for almost any action. A few weeks later while checking the bodies of enemy combatants they found one that had a rosary on him. His Captain couldn't understand how this person could be a Communist and a Catholic. Steve simply stated that no one knows if the man was either or if he was why it mattered. Steve also stated that he hoped the rest had gotten away and that it was better if they didn't have any more fights. This enraged the Captain who screamed "Your job is to destroy the Communists" which Steve replied "No, they're just people like us". To which the Captain stated "They are not people, they are the enemy and you're the reason we are losing this war. You're a coward and a traitor." This type of confrontation amongst the soldiers in Vietnam was happening more and more. Soldiers were disillusioned about why we were there and questioned the orders of their superiors. Soldiers who saw a disconnection between the realities that they witnessed and what they were told. Soldiers who fought hard for their country and who were brave enough to admit that what was happening was wrong. There is a big difference between

someone who is on the front line and those who sit back giving orders from a safe position.

After returning home Steve joined the anti-war protests, eventually joining the Vietnam Vets Against the War, a national veterans' organization that campaigns for peace, justice, and the rights of all United States military veterans. With over 5000 members they held protests to inform the American public to the truth of the Vietnam War. One realizes that the end of the Vietnam War came not with a bang but when thousands of soldiers and the families of those fallen tossed their medals over the wire barricade at the Capitol.

This story was chosen because being a Vietnam Vet I also witnessed the disconnection between the reality that was Vietnam and the information we were fed by the government. We were expected to see the enemy as monsters, and not as people whose land was invaded. We were told to fear Communism for no other reason but it was Communism. Even though I was against the war, I voluntarily joined the Navy as a Corpsman, so that I could help anyone in need, friend or foe, and not to kill. When more and more people saw that even the returning soldiers had become anti-war protestors, support for the war withered away. The only ones left supporting the war were the far right wing who had never set foot in-country.

Very well written and supported.
I had a feeling you'd choose these
stories John.