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Assignment One

Part One - George Watkins:

It was hard to choose a particular story to use for this assignment; they all were amazingly moving. Having been a Corpsman in Vietnam during the "war" gave me a better insight, to the stories told within this book, than most students. George Watkins was an example of the average soldier at the time; knowing very little about Vietnam, other than the scary stories they had heard. The reason his story caught my attention was that he, like so few, did not have an inbred hatred of the people he was fighting against. He knew that it wasn't the people but the politicians, on both sides, that made war happen. Reading his story gave me the impression of a person that was not highly educated, the norm for the grunt soldier in Vietnam. Coming from a poor family, George understood how one does not give up on your land, even where it is in the middle of a war. He saw that the people returned to their land, even after it was "burned and destroyed." His account of his injuries brought back memories of the horrors witnessed throughout my tour; soldiers, on both sides, horrible mutilated. One moment, he was moving out with his platoon, the next he was "laying in a hot hole" with no pain, just numbness. Recounting his journey, from treatment in the field, transport to the aid station at Camp Evans to the events on the SS Sanctuary forced memories to creep back that had been long ago been banished to the darkest areas of my mind. It was hard to aid so many fallen soldiers, some you just had to put aside, hoping they survived long enough to be helped or that they died peacefully without too much pain. But the biggest reason I was drawn to George's story was that he had no bitterness to the people of Vietnam. His recollection of his visit to the "Wall" and how he ran his hands over it, feeling each and every name and asking the question "Why did all these people die?" reminded me that we still have not had that question answered.

Part Two:

How about my questions to his credibility?
You only implied it, due to your own experience in country.

Beginning this part of the assignment was thought to have been the easier task but ended up being harder for numerous reasons. There was not one story that was lacking a negative impact or a positive lesson. So my choice was the story by Paul Kattenburg in which he related about his attendance at a National Security Council Executive Committee meeting. What was disappointing about this, and many of the stories, was the ignorance by the very people who were in charge, of the basic facts of Vietnam and its people. People in charge, that couldn't care less about Vietnam, who ignored the warnings from those who knew the area and the people. As Paul stated "It was robot thinking about Communism and no distinctions were being made". The only thing Paul got, from trying to educate those who were in charge, was to be kicked out of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. After finally resigning from Policy Planning, he states that he thought that he should make a statement about Vietnam. Sadly, he never did, stating "It wouldn't have done any good" which may have been true, but he should have anyway. - why? reasoning?

As I stated earlier, there was not one story that was lacking a negative impact or a

I'm always interested when students make statements about what others should or should not have done.

positive lesson, so I choose to make a general statement. Each story showed a glimmer of hope and the potential for good that I feel all humans have. Whether it was Henry Prunier, Daniel Redmond, Rufus Phillips or Sergei Khrushchev they all saw something more than the world as being only black and white. It was enlightening to read of people who knew, from the outset, that Vietnam was an unwinnable war. Even though they were ignored, and some removed from their posts, it still shows that humans are capable of compassion for those whose ideals differ from their own. This collection of stories also showed me that true "goodness" lives in humans no matter where they call home. As Vo Nguyen Giap states "A good relationship should be built on an equality of respect."

oh no!
You'll lack
the depth of
analysis I
was after.

Careful here...
They and all
being interviewed
AFTER the
unsuccessful conclusion
of the war.

Last ¶ was the weakest &
~~vague~~ most vague.

John,
You will have the interesting
task of serving as the
student (who served) to
the instructor (who didn't).
Be sure you focus on the
questions I've asked you to answer.
I like your 1st ¶, and appreciate
your sharing, but be sure to address
the posed questions / task. And as always,
I thank you for your service.