

Celese Mauser, History of The Vietnam War, April 14th 2013Assignment 1

The account of Phan Xuan Sinh's experience in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam was one of the more tragic stories that I read, and it impacted me significantly more than the others. I can not imagine how it felt to be drafted into a war that you did not have strong convictions to fight for. The story of Sinh's regiment, who was responsible for the deaths of many local fishermen and their families-including children-seems to be repeated throughout the history of this war. Often, soldiers from the South Vietnamese Military and their French or American allies didn't even know who they were fighting against. There was so much needless suffering inflicted on the people of Vietnam. In war, it seems as though those who are affected the most, are those who aren't even willing participants. They're civilians trying to raise their families and surviving day-to-day amidst a hostile battlefield where both sides are potentially dangerous. Sinh mentions that his regiment's "overwhelming hope, was simply that the war would end." Many of the soldiers who were fighting on the side of the south, were forced into battle without even a just cause to fight for. They witnessed the atrocities first hand, and were often the cause of them. Many were suffering to win someone else's battle. For that reason, I think the depiction of his fellow comrades is reliable. Sinh's position as a platoon leader probably gave him the opportunity to converse more openly with the soldiers-giving him a better idea as to the general consensus among them. One of the more interesting aspects of his story was his shock in learning the intensity of the hatred the "communist side" had for them. Without a commitment and passion to fight against their brothers, it was impossible for the South to win.

One of the more disappointing views that I read came from Richard Olsen, an American Pilot during the war. I was struck at how non-nonchalant he spoke of the time he spent in Vietnam. He mentioned that "Vietnam was all about cool pilots," and spoke of his experience as if it were a celebration, drinking as much as he could, partying in the club, and having the ability to take regular showers. Even though he was a pilot who was responsible for airstrikes, he was so far removed from the repercussions of his actions and the lifelong affects they had. He spoke of Vietnamese children with bullet-holes through their legs without any indication of remorse. Olsen's position on the war was very ethnocentric, and concluded that Americans were there to show the South Vietnamese Military how it should be done. He joked about wanting to shoot them for their desire to escape on the choppers.

The most inspiring story thus far came from Malcolm Browne who was a reporter and covered The Vietnam War for The Associated Press. He spoke of his experience on Christmas Eve while staying in a Vietnamese Ranger camp run by American Special Forces advisors. The Viet Minh's headquarters were very close to where he was staying. The Special Forces lit mortars to celebrate the holiday and were surprised to see return fire in the sky, coming from the Viet Minh. It was a way of calling a cease-fire for the night (A rare glimpse of humanity shared between the two enemies.) This story reminds me of other wars, where both sides put down their weapons to play a game of soccer together. It's amazing to me that many of those fighting in war are so apt to forget the commonalities shared between them and their enemy. We're all humans and we all have the same basic needs and desires. If a Christmas celebration or a soccer game in the middle of a battlefield, can bring sworn enemies together for a moment of understanding, that says a lot about the power of love. This story gave me hope that we can develop a higher level of understanding and compassion for other cultures, which hopefully aids in the prevention of future wars.

Note: I realize that this needed to be double-spaced. The paper was double-spaced before I copied and pasted it into Moodle. I cannot figure out how to double-space within this program. My keyboard shortcuts are not working within it either.

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Paper was on the brief side. #1 was the best, but some vague or poorly worded claims hurt your analysis. #2 & 3 were the weakest on analysis. (Olsen's a jerk & the "power of love")