

HST 195: History of Vietnam War Sp17 (Escobar 42050)

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Register Guard Letters

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, May 13, 2017, 9:44 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Register Guard Letters topic.

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All Points Of View Are Essential

by William Barker - Sunday, May 14, 2017, 9:13 PM

I've seen and heard a lot of stories about the terrible treatment towards American soldiers returning from Vietnam. I'm not only recounting what I've learned here in this class, I'm also going off of the numerous accounts I've been exposed to throughout my life. But now, different from when I was younger, I am faced with *actual* accounts that are remembered by soldiers who were *directly* involved in these heinous actions. Fortunately, many American soldiers were not exposed to the ugly reality of the almost, hysterical, atmosphere the anti-war demonstrators worked themselves in to. On the other hand, a lot of brave men returning home had to endure unspeakable crimes against them, perpetrated by the anti-war hippies.

"I was called a "baby killer" to my face more than once; I was told "I'd like to buy you a beer if you will take that stinking uniform off" (that statement resulted in somewhat of a violent encounter); and yes, I was spat on just outside the San Francisco airport while waiting for my flight home." (Herman Isaacs, *Register Guard Letters*) This horrifying account briefly recaps the nature of the anti-war protestors at Oakland Army Terminal.

"My experience was that returning as a Vietnam veteran was a simple event. Nor has any Vietnam vet ever related to me an incident about being spat upon. The protestors, whom I met weeks later, simply asked that I join in the protesting, never once being disrespectful." (Robert L. Shaw, *Register Guard Letters*) Here we have an example which demonstrates that, not always did returning vets immediately become targets and spat on. Unfortunately, to say the least, Mr. Shaw was discriminated against simply because he fulfilled his civic duty once he tried to return to normal life.

"I remember, arriving at Travis Air Force Base in Oakland. Leaving the gate in a bus to a group of anti-war demonstrators hitting our bus with rotten tomatoes and eggs." (United States Veteran, *American Soldiers Speak* 6:30) Once again the ugly truth rears its head and yelling at us that these demonstrators were in fact pretty ruthless towards our men in uniform.

When dealing with first-hand accounts, I believe most of them as fact. Especially with our men and woman who were in uniform, they're just telling us the straight story about what they themselves experienced. So then, with that being said, I also need to be exposed to all sides of the stories and also the differing opinions and different experiences all vets had. Only then can I make a "clear" picture of what was going on. Did anti-war hippies spit, throw tomatoes, curse at, and threaten US soldiers coming home from war? Yes. Were some vets treated worse from folks who weren't out in the streets, and actually at their jobs? Yes. Did this happen to every single GI returning home? No. And thank God for that.

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Re: All Points Of View Are Essential

by Kelsey Gilseth - Sunday, May 21, 2017, 1:52 PM

William,

I truly appreciate your post. Your conclusion is so strong and does an excellent job of explaining that not every returning veteran had a terrible experience, but that doesn't make the less fortunate encounters any less true. Rodney Gordon, one of the many Vietnam veterans that wrote to the Registered Guard in response to the instances of spitting (or lack there of) on returning soldiers, made a valid point. "I don't believe that it happened throughout the country and most vets did not have to go through this abuse, but it did happen to a few. It's not an issue about patriotism, but what is right and wrong," (Gordon, February 25, 2007 Registered Guard). With a topic that has so much controversy, of course different people are going to provide different stories that don't coincide. It saddens me that some people, like Bob Thompson, go to such drastic measures to deny the spitting events. He says "Unless Preuss can provide references to proven instances of such behavior, I will be steadfast in my understanding that exhaustive research on that very topic has shown no examples of such behavior, period," (Thompson, February 16, 2007 Registered Guard). His entire premise is based on media searches into the topic, but how could you compare the media to interviews and statements from actual Vietnam soldiers? I stand by your decision to believe most of the first-hand accounts. I would be willing to listen to any veteran who wished to tell me about their experiences with the Vietnam War. However, hearing inconsistencies between veteran stories would not cause me to believe they are any less credible.

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3



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Re: All Points Of View Are Essential

by William Barker - Sunday, May 21, 2017, 6:12 PM

Kelsey,

Your concluding sentence (and the whole response) was exactly how I feel. I absolutely love our Veterans and think it is wise to listen to their stories and comprehend all aspects of history from first hand accounts. I agree with you on the topic of the despicable way in which "Bob Thompson the pin-head" conducted himself. It's incredible to know there are people so entrenched in politics, (even after so many years) that it clouds their common sense and hardens their hearts in hate and ignorance.

Thank you for your view point Kelsey!

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Re: Register Guard Letters

by Mason Peckels St.onge - Tuesday, May 16, 2017, 11:25 PM

After reading the articles from the Register Guard it is clear that the "spitting" incidents will be forever shrouded with mystery. There seems to be an even amount of people who say it happened and it didn't happen. In order to get the closest thing to the truth I think we should pay close attention to the Veterans and the Protesters who experienced these encounters.

So if I was to write my own book, like Appy, I would like to get a balanced amount of varying accounts and opinions. Relative to spitting, however, I would use the Veterans. This is the population that the whole topic is about, so I believe they are going to have the most accurate experiences. From the Register Guard population I would use all the veterans who spoke up against Bob Thompsons reply.

As far as a not to the reader goes, I think it would be necessary. However, I would need to be as unbiased as possible, only giving the facts. It would be a challenge though, considering the "facts" we are told are true are normally disputed by varying sources such as the problem AIM has with PBS.

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Re: Register Guard Letters

by Riley Ahrenkiel - Sunday, May 21, 2017, 5:39 PM

Mason,

I definitely agree that if we are to get closest to the truth, we should be paying close attention to those who have the first hand encounters in regards to the unfair treatment of Vietnam veterans. Having a larger compilation of stories on the issue allows us to get a wider spectrum of all the possible experiences that people have had. It's not that one person's experience is more right than the other, but that all of these experiences add to the overall reality of the situation. As a student, I

feel like concerning myself with the historical accuracy of the accounts from our own veterans perspectives is less of a problem, compared to events discussed in the past AIM videos and PBS documentary. However, using/analyzing first hand accounts from the veterans, it's more difficult to be able to fact check them because who's to say in the year 2017 that someone was or wasn't spit on, verbally abused, or denied a job due to them serving their country around fifty years ago.

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If I was the author of Patriots which stories from the letters to the editor PDF would I use and why?

by Jerrel Brown - Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 1:35 PM

I have been wrestling with how to effectively answer this question for a few days now, and I have found that the answer has proven to be much more complicated than I originally anticipated it would be. It seems that the effects of the North Vietnam's propaganda tactics to use the American media to effectively win the war had much farther reaching consequences than I originally considered, one of which is this apparent void of recognition of how difficult it was for many GI's returning home from duty. H. Hilliard Gastfriend makes an excellent point in his letter to the editor, mentioning that the digitalization of news articles and what not didn't take place until the 80's, long after the war had ended, and my guess would be that because there was still such a negative attitude attached to the war in Vietnam (and the brave soldiers how fought in the war) around that time, that not many people felt it necessary to get eye witness accounts from people who fought in the war and lived to tell about it. And from this void of information we get some pretty aggressive ignorance coming from the miss informed. So with this in mind, which of these accounts would I use for the patriots book? Even though I would love to use all of them, I will limit myself to 3 stories to include in the book. I would use these three stories in this order : 1.) BOB THOMPSON 2.) H. HILLIARD GASTFRIEND 3.) ROBERT L. SHAW. Now, why Include these three stories in

lieu of others presented? Simple; framing. Mr. Thompson's accusation that returning veterans from the Vietnam War were spat on and protested against is a fabrication really frames the discussion for the mistreatment/ continued mistreatment of veterans, implying that there is no empirical evidence that our veterans were mistreated in any way. This acts as a great Segway for Mr. Gastfriend and his letter which debunks the claims made by Mr. Thompson and the sources from which we derived his information, and even includes a quote from a well-recognized reporter who had originally published an article describing veterans being spat on, and even admitting that he used the example of being spat at, because the other offences committed by protesters were far too despicable and graphic to publish. And finally Mr. Shaw's letter, where he explains that although he himself was not met with any particular hostility upon returning home, he was faced with other injustices because of his service in Vietnam, including being unable to find work or keep a job despite his qualifications because of people prejudice towards Veterans.

Presenting these stories I will include a small after note to the reader to clarify that in instances when you are unsure what took place in history that it is always best to consult ALL of the resources that you have at your resources, and that if you ignore a resource as valuable as personal experiences of people who participated or lived through a historical event, you will often find yourself forming conclusions about that historical event that are far from accurate.

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Re: Register Guard Letters

by Skyler Tidwell - Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 3:54 PM

The Vietnam War was a complex war all on its own. The war took its toll on the people who served in it. On the other end of this catastrophic ending, was the time when our people were able to come home. This topic pains people to this day to talk about. When talking about their homecoming some have great

memories of that day or the opposite. In my opinion I believe it really depended on where that person came from. If a soldier went home to a place that had and continued to have extremely hard feeling about the war, their homecoming might have not been what they hoped for. Also in vice versus, if a person came from a place that was high in Patriotism or Nationalism they homecoming could have been completely different.

When watching the class materials and the readings a person can get a variety of view points on people who actually lived it. In the reading the "*Spitting handout*" the main man named Bob Thompson who states in his publication on February 16, 2007 that there were no media reports on spitting on any veterans. However, if we look at the truth the media does not cover everything and especially if their spin on the topic would come out poorly. On the other end of the fence, we have people like Thomas W.Postelle, Rodney Gordon, and Herman Isaacs which feel that in a scene that Bob has no idea what he is talking about. There has been no research or data collected on every single veteran, in turn that means that no one man can declare that nothing or something had happened because he or she just doesn't know. In contrast, when listening to the POW's video clip and how they described how they were treated and then only seeing negative news, propaganda, and protests/ riots. That in a nutshell would crush all feelings toward the American people back home. Who knew what to think or what to do? A man named Fred Cherry stated in the film that "we were upset and did not know what was happening to the American people."(POW's 23:50) Try putting yourself in their shoes, how would that make you feel? The veteran of our time had to live through some of the hardest conditions foreign and domestic.

My position, on the readings stands with the veterans because they lived it firsthand. Also Bob Thompson wrote his opinion on this topic and has no credentials to back it up. Also he pretty much used the bases of his thoughts from other's work and sited them in his passage.

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Re: Register Guard Letters

by Emily Gibson - Saturday, May 20, 2017, 8:13 AM

Skyler,

Deciphering through readings and trying to get the facts on the matter of the Vietnam War is hard, I think we have all figured that out. With all the information out there how are we to even begin to decide what is real and what is altered with? I have to agree with you, soldier's viewpoints I believe give us the greatest insight on what the war was like. The problem with the spitting matter, is like you said, everyone had a different experience. When reading and watching all of our sources, we must take in consideration that all soldiers had different experiences in the war. This doesn't make one more right or wrong than the other. You made a great point that coming home, would depend on where you flew into. The Register Guard letters mention San Fran as a huge anti-war movement place. Rodney Gordon says "When I got off the plane in San Francisco, I experienced being spat at and was the subject of verbal abuse." Others, might have had a different experience if flying into another airport, like you said.

The key in understanding what information is correct is looking at the evidence. Bob Thompson's article is indeed not an accurate representation of what soldiers went though, considering he wasn't one. I think soldiers accounts are so important in understanding what went on during the war, and all of their experiences are valid.

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Writing Patriots

by Riley Ahrenkiel - Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 4:00 PM

If I was the author of Patriots with all of these different letters, I think the only one I wouldn't include is the one written by Tom Preuss, because in this one, as the reader, I'm not given any insights on the Vietnam war, other than that with the withdraw of US forces, it left hundred of thousands of Vietnamese killed by the communists. He then goes on to attack the author of the original excerpt calling him "an abject coward." It doesn't seem that Preuss' goal is to offer his on point of view on the topic at hand, which is "Spitting on returning Vietnam Vets" or in general the treatment of soldiers post-war. Therefore, I don't believe Preuss' excerpt is worth adding to the conversation. I would then make note to the reader for the rest of the excerpts that these are subjective accounts from soldiers themselves, emphasizing that each person has their own personal experience in the Vietnam War, and that it's alright to have conflicting point of view because all together they add to the reality of the situation. Some vets were welcomed home with open arms, others didn't have so simple, and the same can be said for their experience in war, not just after.

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Re: Writing Patriots

by William Barker - Sunday, May 21, 2017, 8:50 AM

Riley,

I sort of agree with you on this point. Without any context, no I would not include the letter by Tom Preuss in the book. However, if I included all of the letters which we saw, I think this would be a valuable excerpt to show history students. This gentleman, Tom Preuss, is obviously very passionate about the subject he was writing about, and I would want students to see a Vietnam Veteran speaking against someone who is indirectly calling him a liar. I think it's good to see how a Veteran would act in this particular situation, even if he doesn't add anything to the conversation at hand, it shows us how he thinks and acts now days.

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What can this compilation of stories tell us about learning the truth's of the Vietnam War era?

by Jerrel Brown - Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 5:03 PM

The biggest lesson that I absorbed from the PDF of compiled stories in relation to finding the truth of what actually took place during the Vietnam War era of the United states, is a lesson that can be applied when looking for the truth in anything you come across in life; consult all resources on hand. Just because

a source seems to be giving you correct information is no reason to neglect checking the other sources of information that surround you, because even if what you find is bat-shit-crazy, all that does is strengthen your argument and point of view. We need to look at all sides of history before we can really grasp the full gravity of what took place, not just in the name of historical accuracy, but also to pay proper respect to the soldiers who were branded child killers and bigots for giving their best effort fighting for freedom, and to hold those who naively treated these war heroes like common criminals responsible for all the harm they have caused to not only the image of the American soldier, but also to the American soldiers themselves. Does throwing rotten produce and spitting on a 20 year old draftee coming home from war hurt the man who forced him to serve there? I would argue not.

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Re: What can this compilation of stories tell us about learning the truth's of the Vietnam War era?

by Emily Gibson - Saturday, May 20, 2017, 9:02 AM

Jerrel,

I loved this post and reading about your thoughts regarding how to take in sources. I agree, without multiple sources and taking in all different information, it's hard to decide on what you believe is correct. Before watching the AIM video, and other sources Joe presented to us, I realized how silly I was to be engulfed into what everything the PBS video was telling me. Sure, there is bias in soldier's points of views, but I believe they are more reliable because they are first hand experiences. I noticed in the PBS video too that they interviewed a lot of Viet Cong soldiers, which is great for sources, but it also makes me skeptical because they were so persuasive with propaganda techniques during the war. In the POW video, Jim Stockdale remembers the propaganda expert of Vietnam say, "We know we can't compete with you on the battlefield, that doesn't win wars though. It's national will." The anti-war protests not only took a huge toll on the war outcome, but also all the soldiers who were greeted poorly coming home." (POW video) Then going on to what you said about how the soldiers were treated, it irritated me reading Bob Thompson's response. Who is he to say how people were treated? And all of it still doesn't justify the actions of protestors on the soldiers.

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Re: What can this compilation of stories tell us about learning the truth's of the Vietnam War era?

by Jerrel Brown - Saturday, May 20, 2017, 4:45 PM

Emily,

I am very glad that you feel similarly! One of the things that things that examining the Vietnam War these past weeks has made much more clear to me, is that humans are naturally inclined to fall victim to bias. It's a shame but its the hard truth. But hope is not lost! Since we know about this obnoxious inclination of ours, getting around this road block becomes easy; if we are inclined to believe EVERYTHING that we hear, than the only logical course of action is to learn all there is to know about the subject regardless of which side of the argument. And since the dictionary definition of bias is : "prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair." This method is more or less guaranteed to steer you in the right direction.

Knowing this, how do you think you can apply these lessons to your future studies?

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Re: What can this compilation of stories tell us about learning the truth's of the Vietnam War era?

by Emily Gibson - Saturday, May 20, 2017, 9:37 PM

Jerrel,

Something I have learned pretty fast since entering college, is that you apply things learned in different classes throughout school. Obviously maybe not the information learned, but the techniques you carried out in those classes. You learn what study tricks work, and which ones to avoid. You learn how to set up a paper, and what different types look like. The lesson learned in this class is so valuable. Looking through sources critically keeps us continuing our learning and helps us develop our own perspectives. This strengthens our knowledge and argument. With all that being said, what so far has been your favorite source Joe has given us, and which do you think has the most room for unneeded bias?

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Similarities between Soldiers

by Emily Gibson - Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 7:29 PM

Comparing the American POW video, the Soldiers Speak clip, and the Register Guard letters, I found numerous similarities between soldiers who had completely different experiences over the course of the Vietnam War. Each group of veterans had different war stories, some more tragic the other, but something remained the same in all of them.

The American POW video is the one that took the biggest toll on me. The tragedy and torture each POW experienced is something they carry with them forever. They were constantly tortured for information, while also not being allowed contact with other soldiers around them. They ended up creating a system of communication by tapping through the walls of their cells. A soldier says, "They wanted to keep us from communicating, they wanted to break us up, split us up so we couldn't gain strength from each other. And they were never able to for the entire time we were there." (American POW video) They found a way to foster this sense of American identity, which helped them carry the will to survive and not give information to the Viet Cong. After listening to the soldiers speak video, I realized the soldiers in each clip had a lot in common. One soldier at the beginning of the recording says "This is what I've trained for, all my adult life, the boy scouts... Of course I will go to Vietnam." Soldiers believed they had a duty to their country to serve, and this brought them all together. I think creating friendships through their American spirit is what got most soldiers through the war, and is something they all share.

Another similarity I found was their reactions to the people's protest back home. From each of the sources, I feel as if the soldiers were disappointed in their country, and felt unappreciated. In response to Register Guard post to Bob Thompson, many veterans were infuriated that he acted as though he knew what the soldiers went through when they arrived home. Several letters received shows that in fact the soldiers were spat at. One soldier, Rodney Gordon wrote, "If the spit did hit me, there would have been a confrontation." He along with others, were angry. Looking at the soldiers speak video, a soldier says "I left the gate of the bus, to a group of antiwar demonstrators hitting our bus with rotten tomatoes and eggs." This would have been a very hard scene for each of the soldiers, coming home from such a brutal war. In the POW video, they mention the propaganda expert of the Viet Cong. Jim Stockdale recalls him saying "We know we can't compete with you on the battlefield, that doesn't win wars though. It's national will." The anti-war protests not only took a huge toll on the war outcome, but also all the soldiers who were greeted poorly coming home.

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Re: Similarities between Soldiers

by Kayla Elliott - Saturday, May 20, 2017, 8:16 PM

I think you did a great job at comparing all these videos and information and finding the similarities.

I think a very important aspect of the war that you brought up was the Viet Cong propaganda. The United States couldn't fully commit to the war, send in combat troops, and participate in war like we normally could because we never fully declared war on North Vietnam. The reason we didn't do this was because of political reasons because so many Americans were against us being there in the first place because of the propaganda the Viet Cong put out. Because we couldn't fully commit to being in the war, we ultimately lost the war.

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Re: Similarities between Soldiers

by Emily Gibson - Saturday, May 20, 2017, 9:37 PM

Kayla,

I never put those two together, but I agree! It's hard for us to comprehend what the politicians then, like LBJ and McNamara were thinking at this time. I think that is another reason why we must look into all sources to try to grasp it. I think the propaganda was a huge reason we never declared war. I think LBJ was scared of failing, and didn't want his country to turn on him, we see how well that went... The presidents didn't do the best job on informing the congress or getting permission either. We find out this week in Episode 8 about the secret bombing campaign in Laos and Cambodia. The congress didn't get the truth until close to the end of the war! It's hard to understand the thought process behind each president.

What source do you consider the best out of the ones given that gives us the best description of LBJ's actions?

I would have to go with the Herring book in my opinion. Although I think there may be some bias in his writing, I think he does a good job of capturing different emotions of LBJ and other officials during the war. For example, the book captures the how conflicted Johnson feels, continue this chaotic war or help calm the home front. He says "Johnson had steadfastly opposed any reduction of the bombing.." (Herring, 248) A little on he says "He recognized the need to do something to still the growing outcry against the war at home." (Herring, 248)

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Re: Similarities between Soldiers

by William Barker - Sunday, May 21, 2017, 8:38 AM

Like I said in my post above, we are obligated to read many different first hand accounts in order to comprehend the full scope if what was going on in history. Every single person is an individual with a unique view on the Vietnam war. Whether it be a civilian, soldier, general, or even a communists, we need to enlighten ourselves with as many points of view as possible.

I like how you touched on the POWs who devised the secret tapping code in order to keep themselves strong. I was really moved by hearing how those boys kept their morale up, through talking to each other. It goes to show how valuable brotherhood and friendship is, in the darkest of hours. This even applies to the regular enlisted man, stormin' through the jungles and losing friends is incredibly hard to cope with, and the only way to survive is by depending on your brothers and God.

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Re: Similarities between Soldiers

by Emily Gibson - Sunday, May 21, 2017, 9:37 AM

My favorite source so far we have been given is the POW video. I think it does a great job of capturing the brutality of the war, and also shows us many perspectives. I think the part of the video that showed the most strength of the soldiers is the parade. A veteran mentions how he held back one of his soldiers from screaming, to not show weakness to the rioters. I thought it was crazy how the Viet Cong soldiers had to eventually turn their weapons to the rioters to try to calm them down. Hatred consumed the war. The most heartbreaking this for me about this video

was the talk about soldiers feeling "weak" giving into the torture. No matter how weak they felt, they showed tremendous strength and loyalty to their country. Definitely will have an impact on anyone who watches this video.

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Re: Similarities between Soldiers

by Daine Taylor - Sunday, May 21, 2017, 11:19 PM

Emily,

Your response was well constructed and every through. I agree with you that many veterans that had experienced the hatred felt disappointed in their country! It was a tragedy for those American soldiers that had to be tortured for information and those who gave their life to protect the information! Do you feel the same way for the Viet Cong who may have been captured by Americans and tortured? Do you think there was anything our government could have done to prevent the hatred that our veterans experienced?

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Re: Register Guard Letters

by Kayla Elliott - Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 8:22 PM

If I were the author of the *Patriots* book, I would include the story from Robert L. Shaw, where he was talking about how he never got spat on but he had difficulties getting and keeping a job. I think it gives another perspective on how soldiers were treated after returning home from the Vietnam War. It wasn't just protesters spitting or giving verbal abuse, it was hard to integrate back into society, when most of your professional experience you had was being at war.

I would also put in the story by Herman Isaacs, when he talks about some of the things he was called and what was said to him. Things like "baby killer" and getting told to take off his uniform. He also mentions how California was a particularly rough place to come back to.

I think both of those stories gave a good insight into what the greeting was, or lack thereof, when they got home.

I think the hardest part about learning the truth about the Vietnam War is that so many things were covered up or just not talked about. So, that has many people believing things, like veterans never got spat on, because they didn't see it all over the news. That leaves a lot of the information we are getting to be "he said/she said" or opinions instead of ha