

Due date: Saturday, 17 October 2009, 09:10 PM

Last edited: Saturday, 17 October 2009, 08:43 PM (630 words)

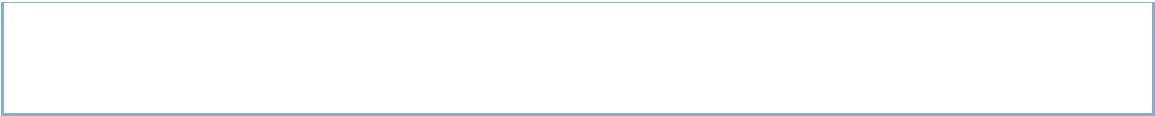
Journal Entry #2

Part 1:

When reading first hand accounts of people's experiences with war it can be a very emotional experience. One emotion that I have found myself experiencing often when reading some of these stories is disappointment. The story that frustrated me the most was the account by John Singlaub. There were two main reasons that I was so upset with this section. The first is how America as a country is depicted (and I think it is an accurate depiction). When you read of things like the kidnapping of North Vietnamese fishermen and their subsequent brainwashing you can't help but feel like something isn't right. When, as a country, you have to abuse people and take away their rights so that you can ultimately achieve, for them, "freedom", bells should go off somewhere. What might even be worse than how we treated the N. Vietnamese whom we were trying to brainwash is how we would use our "allies" in the south for this same pursuit. It isn't the fact that we, through bribery and coercion, recruited these "commandos" to be dropped into the North for a very dangerous operation that makes me the most frustrated. It is the fact that we did this knowing that it was doing little to no good! To me this smacks of pure racism. From the beginning we seemed to treat these people as lesser than us in almost every way, and when you dehumanize someone to a certain point, it becomes easy to sacrifice them for the sake of "good conversation at the cocktail parties in Washington". The second aspect of this story that really disappointed me was the attitude and obviously flawed beliefs of the speaker himself. To me this can be summed up by the maddening comparison he makes between the Viet Cong and the American Indian. What happened to the American Indians during our country's westward expansion is, indeed, a very sad story, but just for the opposite reason that he lays out. What happened to these people was genocide, and he is sympathizing with the conquerors. I do see some similarities between the VC and Native Americans, but certainly not as Mr. Singlaub does. These were both a peoples fighting for their own self governance. The difference is that the Native American's never got it. All of this being said, however, I think this section of the book is invaluable. We simply have to hear it from all sides, no matter how much we might disagree with one side or the other.

Part 2:

There were also times when I read this section of the book that I felt more hopeful. In Paul Hare's account we see a thoughtful man who better represents me in the way that he saw what was going on around him. He was confused, ignorant and afraid, and he says so. "...I never felt sure about my understanding of where they stood with respect to this conflict". This is a question that should have been more at the heart of what the US government was asking all along. "I always was of the belief that whatever we were trying to do should be through the Vietnamese." This is a man that lived with these people as the only outsider for some time. He seemed to see these people as just that, people. I believe that his confusion is caused by the fact that we were not there for the people of Vietnam to begin with. The fact of the matter is, we, as a country, fight ONLY for our own self interests. What bothers me more than this fact is how vehemently we argue otherwise. Paul Hare seems to know something that John Singlaub never will.



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