Multiple Perspectives on the Vietnam War: Story #1

NGUYEN TAN THANH EXPLAINS WHY HE JOINED THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (1951), 1986

I joined the VC [Vietcong] when I was thirty-five years old. I was married and had four children. I was leasing farmland - one hectare [about 2.5 acres] - that was very poor in quality, almost sterile. That was why the owner rented it out to us. Despite working hard all year round, we got only about 100 gia of rice out of it. Of this amount, 40 gia went to the landlord. We borrowed money to buy ducks and geese. We lived a very hard life. But I cultivated the land carefully, and in time it became fertile. When it did, the owner took it back; my livelihood was gone. I had to go back to my parents, to raise ducks for my father.

I was poor. I had lost my land and I didn't have enough money to take care of my children. In 1961 propaganda cadres of the Front [National Liberation Front] contacted me. These guys had joined the resistance against the French, and after Geneva they had stayed underground in the South. They came to all the poor farmers and made an analysis of the poor and rich classes. They said that the rich people had always served the French and had used the authority of the French to oppress the poor. The majority of the people were poor, not because they wasted their money but because they had been exploited by the landlords who had worked with the French. In the past, the ancestors of the poor had broken ground for tillage. Then powerful people had seized their land. Without any other means to live, the poor had become slaves of the landlords. The cadres told us that if the poor people don't stand up to the rich people, we would be dominated by them forever. The only way to ensure freedom and a sufficient life was to overthrow them.

When I heard the cadres, I thought that what they said was correct. In my village there were about forty-three hundred people. Of these, maybe ten were landlords. The richest owned five hundred hectares [1,236 acres], and the others had at least twenty hectares [49 acres] apiece. The rest of the people were tenants or honest poor farmers. I knew that the rich oppressed the poor. The poor had nothing to eat, and they also had no freedom. We had to get rid of the regime that allowed a few people to use their money and authority to oppress the others.

So I joined the Liberation Front. I followed the VC to fight for freedom and prosperity. I felt that this was right.


Multiple Perspectives on the Vietnam War: Story #2

FROM THE VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Harold A. Fritz:

Well prior to going to Vietnam, I was still young in Knox and I graduated at OCS, and I knew eventually I would be going and at that time because of the unit I was being assigned to this 6- armour cadre ____ was a replacement for unit that was in Vietnam, so I did not know I was going to be going over there as a unit replacement and there was no hard fighting. We talked to the people that we are coming back and I suggest it depends on where you go, what straw you draw, what unit you go to, and you just have to do everything you can and hopefully you will be able to get back with most of your people and it was just that type of issue, and I was not afraid of that. My wife and I talked about that. It was just the price you had to pay and we knew that. We both knew that and I was not going to go to Canada, I was going to, you know, hide. I was there the lead then and that is what I was looking forward to do.

Unknown interviewer:

[question not transcribed]

Harold A. Fritz:

Well, you just saw me, and when I got rid of the department in Vietnam, you know, my wife and I knew that possibly I would not be coming back just because we saw the casualty reports and so we hope that everything would workout. We tried to keep in touch. We did not have, of course at that time in Vietnam, I think the best means of communication to families, were letters. We did not have a high-speed Internet, some of the things we have today, I think it is good to have it today and so that was the way we could best communicate and we knew that, but there were times when she would not know where I was, she would read the casualty reports in the paper, and just hope that everything was going well and she is did not get a strange car pull up in the front house with an army office in it saying, I am sorry, your husband deceased and we accepted that that is just one of the things we have to do because we saw friends, notices of friend of ours that are killed in Vietnam that I had served with and others that were neighbors back at Lake Geneva. So we knew that the finality of war was reality, it was not the game, it was not rubber bullets, it was not laser tag, it was, you know, life and death, one soldier against another soldier, and we accepted that, we have to. That was the price. That was the pay back. That was part of what we have to pay to continue the freedom and at that time, we are looking and tried to bring freedom to the people of Vietnam and I saw that and the people was just really relishing that. They wanted us to help them. So, not only were we defending our own freedom, but we are trying to help another country with theirs.

https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.89846/

Excerpted from the text transcript:
https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.89846/transcript?ID=mv0001