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From Hanoi to Harvard: Capturing the Complexity of the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War sits at a uniquely perplexing point of American history. The United States' emergence as a global power after World War II, and the visions of men like John F. Kennedy to recreate the emerging "third world" with principles of American democracy instilled in the American public a sense of patriotically smug responsibility. The ideological battle that was the Cold War, which pitted socialism starkly against supposed values of American freedom, only entrenched the citizenry further in their zealous allegiance to patriotism, and their firm rejection of anything that didn't fit that mold. It was this contentiousness of the Cold War, and the pressure on the US government to win this war of attrition, that made the Vietnam war such a dynamic period in American history. The American public watched as the strength of the US military was antagonized by a guerrilla army who avoided direct combat and dug tunnels like men from decades before. They watched as progress stalled, as casualty counts rose, as veterans came back home shells of what they once were. They watched as headline after headline passed under their squirming faces, depicting decimated hamlets, slaughtered children, and wasted grandmothers. Notions of American purpose were blinded by the unsettling realities of both the combat itself and the instability of the homestead.

In the paragraph above, the word "Vietnam" is mentioned only two times, each of these two times it is used as an adjective to the word "war". On the other hand, the word America(n) is mentioned seven, and the acronym US is mentioned an additional two times. The analysis

mentions John F. Kennedy, the Cold War, and socialism. It references the US government, the American public, veterans, and the cultural tensions back home in the US. But the validity of this brief analysis is perhaps best characterized by what it doesn't mention. Who were they even fighting against? Were they the evil forces of communism? Were they fighting against a rag-tag rebel army who lurked in the spaces between rice paddies or underneath the forest's emerald canopy? Was the enemy's struggle driven by a larger sentiment among the North Vietnamese, or were the Vietnamese people only caught in the middle? Unfortunately, the analysis only mentions any semblance of the Vietnamese people once: as "decimated hamlets, slaughtered children, and wasted grandmothers." Not as people with stories, with hopes, with dreams, with perspective, with purpose, but rather as parts of a place, a place deemed meaningless, hopeless, and eventually abandoned by the same people who intended to rebuild it.

The story of the Vietnam war, told to us through depictions in popular culture, firsthand accounts of those involved, and academically focused material, remains in a broad sense a predominantly American experience. As has been thoroughly critiqued by scholars and Vietnam Veterans alike, the Vietnam films released both during the war itself and after the fall of Saigon contribute to a "collective evasion of Vietnam's tough questions" (Anderegg 9). These films, often romanticizing the Vietvet's experience, attempt to apply purpose to an otherwise purposeless situation. The work of authors like Tim O'Brien in *The Things They Carried* and *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* are effective in their anti-romanticization of the Vietnam War, replacing the rhetorically heroic discourse surrounding the American effort with embarrassment, shame, and meaninglessness. While all these works successfully pull Vietnam from the bubble of American patriotism however, they fall short in telling the story of Vietnam in one crucial way. These sources, written by American authors from Western

perspective, fail to effectively humanize the Vietnamese people, and thus remain incomplete in telling the history of the Vietnam War. Forming a holistic picture requires the synthesis of American sources with the works of Vietnamese authors, who enable us, through considering the experience of all sides of the war, to better understand the events of the war in its entirety.

Following the fall of Saigon in 1975, the history of the Vietnam war hung in the balance of historical limbo. For many, Vietnam was the first time the American public, who had become unapologetically devoted to the US military's untouchable image, saw their notions of American superiority questioned. This was in many ways a low for the US government's image in the eyes of the people, especially with politicians on both sides reeling from unrest caused by the Pentagon papers, anti-war protests, and Watergate. When the 1980s rolled around, Americans were presented with two opposing methods of historical interpretation: either take responsibility for our history, accept our wrongdoings in Vietnam and acknowledge that the American values we had hoped to instill morphed into genocide, or write over our history in new terms that glorify America (and Americans) as heroes acting in difficult circumstances. Ushered in by Reagan's extreme nationalism and enforced by Hollywood's renewed patriotism, American understanding leaned towards the right's new image. Vietnam movies like *Rambo: First Blood* glorified the role of the American veteran who for so long had been an object of public scorn. Numerous other forms of media portrayed Americans fighting in Vietnam as victims of a society who had abandoned Kennedy's idealism, the original motivation for entering the conflict (Hellman 146).

Even early historical narratives of Vietnam, which didn't have nearly as much allowance as fictionalized interpretations like *Rambo* did, followed the Americentric trend of 1980s rhetoric. Beyond simply Americanism however, these preliminary accounts of the war's history, either by way of inadvertent bias or lackluster resource (many of the documents regarding

American military conduct were hidden from public consumption), downplay the suffering of the Vietnamese people. Martin and Kathlyn Gay's *Vietnam War: Voices from the Past* (published in 1996), exemplifies one of these sources, attempting to serve as a reference impartial to political opinion and debate. Twenty years removed from the withdrawal of US troops from the region, the book contextualizes the war in a way that American media failed, providing a succinct Vietnamese history in order to express perspective beyond a narrow American bias. It acknowledges the failure of US backed leader Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of South Vietnam, who proved to be an inept, religiously oppressive, and nepotistic dictator (Gay 14). The book even asserts that "In many ways there was more equality under the Viet Minh" than under the democratic south (Gay 14).

But while acknowledgement of Vietnam's reality in less sympathetically American terms is a productive form of discourse, too often do these sources, authored from a western perspective, revert to the predispositions that plague the war's legacy. Specifically, any notion of atrocity committed by American soldiers is prefixed by context that either absolves Americans on the basis of their difficult situation, or emphasizes the "bad apple effect," that the actions of one bad soldier isn't reflective of the general behavior of Americans in Vietnam. In the instances that the book directly references American war crimes, they are either accompanied by a phrase that attempts to salvage the image of the American soldier or interprets the incident as it relates to the perception of the American public. John Kerry, a Vietvet turned American politician, is referenced in the book in his description of how GIs "ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in the addition to the ravage of war" (Gay 31). This direct quote, however, is followed by what the author deemed a crucial part of consideration for the reader, that "The kind of incidents Kerry described were certainly not characteristic of all U.S. troops in Vietnam" (Gay 31). The

impact of his quote is further devalued in the author's next lines, where Kerry is directly contradicted by Lieutenant John McGarrahan, who describes how his soldiers "played with the little kids and shared candy or other goodies with them," saying he'd "never seen anything (atrocities) of that sort" while he was in Vietnam (Gay 31).

Furthermore, the importance of various instances of atrocity by American troops in Gay's book is determined exclusively by their effect on western popular interpretation. The book's chapter on the My Lai massacre, which dives into gruesome detail regarding the events of the day and the various atrocities committed by American GIs. In this light, the events of My Lai, of Trieu Ai, the importance of the innocents who were slaughtered there, are reduced to the scope of western perception, merely causes for the unrest of American citizens. The events and their victims in this way lack their own story.

In order to build this story, to humanize the participants of Vietnam, we need to consider source material that looks at Vietnam not from an analytical angle, but from a personal one. For Americans, perhaps the most familiar work to get started with is that of Tim O'Brien, a Vietnam War veteran turned bestselling author, who has produced some of the most compelling Vietnam war literature available to the American reader. O'Brien's novels *If I Die in a Combat Zone Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*, and *The Things They Carried* among others, are internationally recognized as integral in creating a cohesive understanding of the war. Whereas source material discussed previously either attempts to define the Vietnam War in classic terms of heroism and valor, or in the context of a greater American picture, O'Brien's novels provide a personal and intimate look into what Vietnam was like for those participating in it. In *If I Die in a Combat Zone Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*, O'Brien, who writes through the lens of his own experience, successfully brings the American soldier down from the lofty expectations defined

by the likes of *Rambo* and other Hollywood interpretations. Rather, O'Brien and his men are portrayed as unaware, careless, and scared, who by way of their toxically masculine and undoubtedly xenophobic military training, succumbed to a predisposition to violence that seeped into every corner of the war. When reflecting on his basic training, O'Brien describes how he "gave into soldiering," characterizing himself and the men around him as "frightened, homesick boys . . . unwilling to escape and yet unwilling to acquiesce, no one to help, no consolation" (O'Brien 39). This less than traditional view of the American GI is juxtaposed by O'Brien's hard-nosed drill sergeant, named Blyton, who fits the toxically masculine mold of his position: angry, spiteful, and ignorant himself, hating all things contrary to strict patriotism. He frequently taunts O'Brien for his college education and uses sexist derogatory language to demean anything beyond the simple understanding of the US Military as good and anyone that stands in their way as evil (O'Brien 47).

O'Brien's training also illustrates the structural flaws in the US Military's training model, which encouraged a racist and genocidal military strategy. In basic training, O'Brien frequents what was called the "Quick-Kill rifle range", where soldiers learn to indiscriminately fire off rounds "without any thought at all" (O'Brien 43). Their drill instructor Blyton also frequently refers to Vietnamese in derogatory language, eradicating any sense of respect or humanity the enemy may be entitled to. Blyton states that "Dinks are little shits, if you want their guts, you gotta go low!" (O'Brien 44). During bayonet training, O'Brien, along with his comrades, is forced to say, with weapons raised "the spirit of the bayonet is to kill! To kill!" (O'Brien 44).

But let's take a step back for a moment. Is military training in preparation for Vietnam not present in the supposedly biased Hollywood films of the 1980s? What separates those interpretations from the interpretations of Tim O'Brien? It is true that there are similarities

between the two interpretations. For example, Blyton's role in *If I Die in a Combat Zone* of the abrasive drill instructor is mirrored by *Rambo*'s colonel Trautman, a special forces instructor, who states that "God didn't make Rambo. I made him" (McClancy 514). But the divergence of the analysis, what separates O'Brien's work from his counterparts in Hollywood, is the treatment of the soldier's transformation. John Rambo's transformation from man to super soldier focuses on the idea that Rambo himself has become some sort of superhero, his awesome physical feats captivating the audience who venerate his prowess. Michael Paris, an expert on the Vietnam war in American media, asserts that while "the film condemns the army for creating a killing machine like Rambo, [they] continually place him in situations where the audience are expected to admire his fighting skills" (McClancy 513). O'Brien's novel, rather than glorifying the supposed 'hardening' of scared children into soldiers, reduces his own bootcamp transformation into a submission to the 'evil' of American soldiering, where he dreaded every day of participation. O'Brien's basic training sheds the militaristic glow of the experience that *Rambo* tried so very hard to embrace, again bringing the Vietnam War back towards the meaningless atrocity that Hollywood attempts to hide.

Beyond removing *Rambo*'s rose-colored glasses from the American GI's Vietnam experience, Tim O'Brien is also very effective in his nuancing of My Lai and other specific events of American atrocity. In Kathryn and Martin Gay's *Vietnam War: Voices from the Past*, the reader is given two pieces of information regarding the My Lai incident: first, the details of what happened, and how it became public knowledge, and second, the outrage of the American public, and its triggering of another wave of anti-war protesting. The missing piece in this analysis is the lack of explanation as to why American troops acted out in such aggressive tendencies. This missing context, combined with the book's overall hesitancy to implicate

American troops in assigning blame for Vietnam, leaves us with an incomplete picture. Where this scholarly work falls short, Tim O'Brien's perspective as a soldier allows him to start his contextualization of My Lai before he even steps foot in Vietnam. O'Brien's characterization of GI training as a toxically masculine display of ignorant xenophobia and sexist objectification gives a preceding cause to the "gang rapes" and "brutal mutilation of civilians" mentioned by Martin and Kathryn Gay (49). By establishing a pattern of flawed behavior at a structural level of the US military, O'Brien can effectively assert that My Lai was not merely an isolated incident of poor judgement, but that the vast scope of atrocity, later documented by Nick Turse (covered in my previous work) and other vigilant researchers, is rather a result of a greater failure of American military strategy. In the words of O'Brien himself, "To understand what happens among the mine fields of My Lai, you must know something about what happens in America. You must understand Fort Lewis, Washington. You must understand a thing called basic training" (O'Brien 32).

But still as we sift through the melancholically elegant prose of Tim O'Brien, there remains a missing piece. In the previously mentioned sources, whether that be war cinema, memoir, or early academic material, the Vietnam war remains an American experience. O'Brien's analysis mainly focuses on his personal exposure, that of the American GI, and while he may attack the war at a very critical lens, the structure of his story still focuses on Americans as protagonists, and the unseen enemy, the VC, as antagonists. It still (rather distantly) resembles the "us vs. them" mentality present in less complex source material. If we take a look at *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, the vast majority of both interactionary and interpersonal connections are between Americans. The few glimpses we do get into the Vietnamese people focus almost exclusively on their status as victims. For example, during his tour of duty O'Brien describes a

specific instance where they are bathed by an old, blind, Vietnamese farmer. While the old man was retrieving water from the well to wash the men, a certain brash, “stupid” soldier unprovokedly hurled a full carton of milk right at the man’s face, knocking him backwards and causing him to bleed all over his face (O’Brien 100). The man in response to this, bound by the hopelessness of his situation, just smiled, and “with the ruins of goodness spread over him,” he began to wash the next soldier (O’Brien 100).

Further instances of senseless violence, such as jovial American gunfire at school aged boys and their cattle who accidentally made their way into a free-fire zone, or the seventy year old grandmother who “scrambled like a wet fish” after an American grenade was hurled into her inconspicuous hamlet, tell a similar story (O’Brien 151). Never in these stories do we ever get anything more about Vietnamese perspective than a description of their suffering by American GIs, who describe the Vietnamese as destroyed hamlets, distant gunshots, exploding landmines, and scattered human remains. Because their stories are never told, because the American perspective fails to treat them as purposeful human beings, the plight of the Vietnamese shrinks into the background of a desolate and meaningless setting.

I want to make it abundantly clear that my argument is in no way asserting that Tim O’Brien is a racially motivated writer, but rather his role in the conflict, which serves as an inspiration for his writing, shows an inherently one-sided point of view. *The Things They Carried* and *If I Die in a Combat Zone* are two of the most influential books of our time, and are essential in understanding the complexity of Vietnam, especially in consideration to American involvement and perception. But Tim O’Brien, like all American GIs, operated from the strict lens of the American military. Therefore, I suggest that in forming a complete understanding of Vietnam, a synthesis is required, between reference sources drawing from diverse perspective,

firsthand accounts of the American GI (O'Brien), and work from Vietnamese authors that give perspective and purpose to the Vietnamese people, both civilian and combatant.

But what does this literature from the Vietnamese point of view give us exactly? Does it not simply echo the hopeless violence and destruction of Tim O'Brien's work? Well in many ways these sources do just that; vague notions of purpose and meaningless violence are motifs present throughout various mediums of material. But the importance of these works lies not in a mere recognition of atrocity, but rather lies in their ability to humanize the Vietnamese people, to tell their stories themselves, offering a perspective too often lost in our analysis.

There are two pieces of literature which I read, written by Vietnamese authors, that effectively encompass this angle: *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace* by Dang Thuy Tram, and *The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam* by Bao Ninh. Both these books, in conjunction with a wide array of other literary and reference material (not examined in the scope of this essay), accomplish the goal of humanizing the north Vietnamese, their situations, and their stories, introducing a complexity to understanding the war as more than a dichotomic struggle between a western good and foreign evil. Far from the enemy dead, invisible gunshots, and submissive civilians of O'Brien's work, these books humanize the Vietnamese people with reason, purpose, and a resolve that elevates them from adversary to freedom fighter, from enemy to equal.

First, the diary of Dang Thuy Tram, a North Vietnamese citizen turned field medic, who served as the chief physician at a field hospital in Central Vietnam during the height of the conflict, offers an Vietnamese equivalent to the various memoirs of American soldiers in Vietnam. Reading Tram's accounts, especially from a patriotically American perspective, requires an open mind – A proud anti-American communist sympathizer, Tram expresses nothing short of utter hatred for western presence in her country. From her perspective, the war

itself, and the mass death and instability that came along with it, is a result of American aggression. Frequently, when recalling her treatment of mortally wounded comrades, she blames the “belligerent American devils (39)” and “Mad dog Nixon (210)” for prolonging the fighting to advance an agenda of their own greed. To her, the Americans are senseless invaders, every dead body presented before her filling her soul with further disdain. “Why,” She says, “are there such terrible cruel people who want to use our blood to water their tree of gold?” (Tram 210).

But Tram’s hatred for the Americans, as the reader discovers, has little in common with the racist hatred of Tim O’Brien’s drill instructors. Rather, Tram’s disdain for American soldiers is built on her experience watching countless people she knew and loved gunned down by American rifles, incinerated by napalm canisters, and buried by B-52 bombers. Thuy describes watching as her “adopted younger brother” Thuan, already having lost his mother and older sister to an American artillery round, “crumples onto the bed and weeps uncontrollably”, unable to comprehend that his father too had met the same fate (Tram 35). She hears from comrade Duong a recount of American soldiers killing his father and brother, leaving his mother to “weep silently by her son’s body, on the bare, charred ground of their burnt home” (Tram 74). Tram describes consoling a heartbroken mother standing over the body of her son Kahn, a boy turned soldier, who “looked as if he had been roasting in an oven” after barely a B-52’s napalm bomb (Tram 142). Given the immense suffering of her people at the hands of American brutality and technology, her hatred for American presence is given justification.

Tram’s point of view is further nuanced by two words, typically associated with American values, that are repeated throughout the story, as a constant reminder of the Vietnam War’s endless complexity: On September 3rd, following the death of Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh, Tram, as a child of a post-colonial Vietnamese future, makes a vow to fulfill his ultimate

goal, to “Liberate the South, secure independence and liberty for our nation” (Tram 155). In this instance the utterance of these words, which serve as the fundamental themes of American founding documents and system of government, gave me, myself and American reader, substantial reprieve. How have the ideas of liberty and freedom, which serve as the very lynchpin of American governmental philosophy, found their way onto the battlefield of Vietnam? If freedom and independence is truly the primary ambition of the North Vietnamese, and the US is all that stands in the way of these egalitarian goals, are we no better than our English colonizers? The power in reading Tram’s diary lies in its situational reappraisal of the Vietnamese cause. The American attitude at the time of entry into Vietnam was to stop the spread of communism, a word that became synonymous with the worst aspects of humanity in the minds of the citizenry. However, as Tram frequently regurgitates, the Vietnamese motivation to fight doesn’t revolve around an ideological framework or a governmental philosophy. It isn’t rooted in an allegiance to communist principles or capitalist hatred. Rather, as Tram illustrates from her view, the many individuals who support their cause “have volunteered to sacrifice their whole lives for two words: Independence and Liberty” (Tram 27).

Dang Thuy Tram’s story came to an abrupt end on June 22, 1970, when her position was compromised by an American platoon. But her diary, discovered on her person by D Company soldiers, profound in its perspective and resolute in its complexity, continues to serve as an essential part in understanding the War in Vietnam. It tells the story not of an unseen enemy, or an extension of Soviet agenda, but rather the story of a people, a purpose, a cause, that extends far beyond the scope of a philosophical debate.

The Sorrow of War, a novel written by the extraordinarily talented ex-NVA soldier Bao Ninh, builds on Tram's work, using Ninh's own experience as a soldier to tell the story of the war from a North Vietnamese angle. The book's initial publishing in 1991 Hanoi was met with resistance from Vietnamese government – it's critically honest portrayal of the North Vietnamese Army was deemed unpatriotic and damaging to public perception of their authority. It's easy to see why; the book is definitively critical of the North Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese, and the American forces in Vietnam, with each in various instances engaging in mutilation of the dead, sexual abuse, and senseless violence towards innocent civilians.

The Sorrow of War also addresses an inherently complex question that evades the objective scope of a textbook, and extends beyond Dang Thuy Tram's limited chronological experience: who won the Vietnam War? Tim O'Brien has already told us that it certainly wasn't the bright-eyed boys turned confused American GIs who left Vietnam either in a wooden casket or with their minds scrambled like eggs. Textbooks will tell you that the fall of Saigon in 1975 marked the beginning of the Communist North's control over the now unified country. In Ninh's work however, any notion of Northern victory is altogether dispelled through the unflinching perspective of our protagonist Kien, an ex-NVA soldier turned Hanoi civilian after the fighting ceased. Kien's story, speaks not of winners and losers, of victory and defeat, but rather reflects on Vietnam as a tragedy, a disaster, that brought with it unimaginable loss and tangential suffering.

Unlike the clear and resolute allegiance to North Vietnamese values displayed by Dang Thuy Tram in her accounts of NVA experience, Bao Ninh's interpretation of North Vietnamese cause is devoid of substantial purpose. Kien, despite his initial enthusiasm towards military service growing up in Hanoi, soon becomes disillusioned by the inequitable structure of the war,

in which the poor and working class become pawns of more powerful sources of influence. Kien laments that the men he fights alongside with, the regular troops, with “simple, gentle, ethical outlooks on life” would be the ones to “bear the catastrophic consequences of this war,” powerless in the determination of their own fate (Ninh 18). Kien says that the reason for Vietnam’s continuous state of warfare isn’t attributable to the young Vietnamese’s lust for combat, but rather that the ones who prolonged war were “others like the politicians, middle-aged men with fat bellies and short legs. Not the ordinary people” (Ninh 75). Kien also touches on the political indoctrination he was pressured into as a soldier, which, much like O’Brien’s military training, promoted vehement nationalism, discouraging free thought, and created men forced to suppress their conscience to obey orders.

Bao Ninh’s representation of the Vietcong soldier, trapped in a war of meaningless violence, reflects that of Tim O’Brien’s American GI, both falling victim to their military indoctrination, acting not out of ambition, but out of hopelessly empty devotion. Trapped is Kien, under the weight of what he’s seen, forced to bear the burden of his own compounding suffering. When considered in this context, and compared to his American counterpart, Kien’s story becomes much simpler; he entered the war with what he thought was bravery and valor, and left that same war, despite nominal victory, devoid of purpose, broken by a suffering he is unable to escape. Both O’Brien and Kien carry the same burden of unfortunate circumstance. In this regard, even though the North Vietnamese are often granted the title of victor, to Kien, the purpose of his plight, the impact of the country’s revolutionary goal, is rendered completely empty against the soul deteriorating loss that he (and his comrades) endured. All that remains, in the words of the soldier himself, is a permanent scar, a reminder of his loss haunting his postwar life: “The sorrow of having survived. The sorrow of war” (Ninh 192).

I've read a good deal of books about Vietnam. I've watched movie clips, I've read articles and academic books, soldier memoirs and media reports. I've tried to approach Vietnam from a culturally sensitive and historically considerate position, to shed my previous bias as a non-participant, to understand the nuance of those who died and those who survived. But no matter how much I read, no matter how many different stories I hear, I still fall well short of deducting firm conclusions about the conflict's more intricate questions. Assigning blame for the Vietnam War is like fixing a chronically broken car. No matter how many questions you answer, how many issues you fix, the engine light continually blinks red, the car keeps breaking down, your previous understanding falls apart, and eventually, one way or another, you find yourself asking the same questions you thought you answered before. But the plurality of differential understanding, the vast array of intertwining perspectives that makes these questions so difficult to definitively answer, is what makes the Vietnam War such an important part of how we understand Vietnamese and American history. The danger lies not in unanswered ethical questions, which will always exist, but rather in the oversimplification that we've seen play out in the various narratives of Hollywood as well as academically focused work. By fitting Vietnam into our traditional understanding of American combat, looking for a definitive good and evil, we become blinded by our own confirmatory bias. Erasing this notion of simplicity and embracing the complexity of Vietnam beyond the lens of our own inclination, even if we may never be able to definitively draw conclusions, is pivotal in creating a better understanding of a war that for so many remains shrouded in darkness.

But despite the seemingly endless heap of inconclusivity, there was one definitive trend among all the firsthand accounts of Vietnam that resurfaced in every aspect of my reading. No matter the role, the allegiance, or the complexity of character, the Vietnam War was categorized

by all as hopeless, as desolate, and as an unbroken suffering. This hopelessness, as documented by its participants, is a crucial understanding for both sides that often escapes the objective scope of textbooks and academic work, which define Vietnam as a war between nations rather than between people. But for all those involved, the Americans, the North Vietnamese, and everyone else caught in the middle, the Vietnam War was a confusing mess of questionable motive, that wrenched loved ones, comrades, dreams, and any hope for the future, away from them, leaving behind empty shells of former selves. And the question everyone seems to ask is why they were even fighting in the first place. Perhaps the only concrete conclusion we can draw is an unsatisfactory one. That no one won the Vietnam War. That despite what it was intended to be, it turned into a hopeless mess. In the words of Bao Ninh (through his protagonist Kien):

Still, even in the midst of my reminiscences I can't avoid admitting there seems little left for me to hope for. From my life before soldiering there remains sadly little. That wonderful period has been heartlessly extinguished. The lucky star of fortune I once had seems also to be gone out forever. It once shone brightly, but quickly burned out. The aura of hope in those early postwar days swiftly faded (Ninh 47).

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