

American Involvement in Vietnam

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This collection focuses on American involvement in Vietnam during the Vietnam War and its aftermath, with special attention to first-person accounts of those who were there. By gathering materials which recount events— including historical works, novels, periodicals, and photographs – the collection aims to understand both the individual and collective experiences of Americans in Vietnam. The published works are supplemented and interpreted through the lens of the experiences of my father in Vietnam in 1967-68 and my own experiences there in the summers of 2004 and 2005.

The first time I learned about my father's involvement in Vietnam I was a young boy. At the time I was too young to contextualize the war and what it meant. I had heard of places like France and Germany, where the grandfathers of my generation had fought Nazi Germany, yet Vietnam was an unfamiliar war and an unfamiliar place.

Throughout subsequent years my curiosity of Vietnam remained. I had wanted to learn everything I could about Vietnam. My interest in Vietnam stimulated by an inherent curiosity not necessarily about the actual war, but instead about what Vietnam really was: a war? A country? At the time, I wasn't really sure what to make of it, and so my curiosity grew; I searched for what I could find about Vietnam- primarily through my dad and what he was able to tell me both about the war, and about the cultural and historical context with which it was fought. As a result, I collected books and memoirs about the war.

As a freshman at the University of Michigan, I met a student who is Vietnamese and whose father had fought for the South. After becoming friends, traveled to Vietnam, where I witnessed the effects of poverty and war in the region which greatly disturbed me, but also fostered a desire to help.

Through UM's Center for Southeast Asian Studies I was able to return to Vietnam on a grant to work with two healthcare NGOs to fight another battle in this land that had seen so many: fighting to improve healthcare for Vietnamese children. These two experiences have had a profound effect on my life. Not only have I been able to visit the country of Vietnam, but I have been able to live there for an extended period of time, traveling throughout the entire country. Lastly, these experiences have shown me how different a place Vietnam is today than it was several years ago. I have been to the very places my father was stationed at when he was in Vietnam, and not only have I visited these former battlegrounds, but I visited them at ages 20 and 21- the same age as my father when he was stationed in Vietnam.

This summer I will be returning to Vietnam to study Vietnamese; I recently was awarded a Foreign Language Area Studies award; I will be studying language in Saigon.