

The Face of the enemy

The Story of the Vietnamese who fought in the American War



Genre	Documentary
Duration	52 min / 85 min
Director	Erik Pauser
Producer	Erik Pauser / Dylan Williams
Production Company	Brandklipparen / AMP Film
Completion	2009

Over four million Vietnamese died in what one side calls the American War and the other side calls the Vietnam War. A war so brutal, that it has been described as their 'own' Third World War by the Vietnamese. In this rare instance, it is those who lost the war that have almost exclusively written its history. Whilst countless stories have been told from the American point of view, most often reducing the Vietnamese to faceless shadows very little has been heard from the other side. The official Vietnamese line meanwhile continues to issue purely one-dimensional propaganda.

The Face of the Enemy is a unique documentary, in that it tells the story of the Vietnamese that fought in "The American" war, in their own words. In the film the veterans have the chance, often for the first time, to recall the experiences that transformed and changed their lives. A film that has inspired the filmmakers is Peter Davies' "Hearts and Minds" from 1975. A documentary, whose truth and relevance has been merely re-strengthened with the passage of time. The title of that film refers to a speech given by Lyndon B. Johnson in which he proclaimed the escalation of the American involvement in the Vietnam War. In the speech, Johnson re-iterated his claim that, "The ultimate victory will depend on the hearts and minds of the people who actually live out there". Whilst Davis's film looks closer at the Americans, this film looks at the other side.

The core of this film - The Face of the Enemy - is to investigate the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese who fought in that war. How did they sustain their morale in the face of such overwhelming odds? What did they believe in? How do they look at the war now?

FORM

In 'The Face of the Enemy' we piece together their compelling unheard stories. The addition of rare archive footage and personal photos of the veterans themselves aids the attempt to chart a whole new perspective on one of the most decisive conflicts in modern history.

Whilst for the most part following the chronology of the war, the film focuses more on the personal stories of these characters than on the main events of the war. What did they feel when they joined the army? When they first arrived at the front? How did they see their comrades? The enemy? Their families back at home? The recollections and observations of the main characters will be supported and enhanced by a "choir" of other characters. This choir will further establish the fact that the stories told by our main protagonists can be seen or shared by the majority in Vietnam today.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

Nho, Hung and Suong

These three women now in their 60s fought in an all female guerilla platoon. Determined to prove themselves as equals to the men they became experts at the art of war. These grandmothers became specialists in constructing booby traps and ambushing the American soldiers. For over 8 years they lived in the Cu Chi tunnels outside Saigon. A system of tunnels extending over 250 km.

Le Ly Hayslip

Writer Le Ly was a small girl in 1965 when the first American soldiers arrived in her village in central Vietnam. During the day the Americans and the South Vietnamese ruled the village. During the night it was the Vietcong. Like so many others, Le Ly was caught in the middle. She escaped to Saigon where she became a bargirl. Later the urge to tell her story drove her to become a writer and the first Vietnamese to tell the American audience another side of the story about the Vietnam War. Le Ly's first book was a great success, later to become a major Hollywood movie directed by Oliver Stone.

Mr. Diu

He was as committed as any North Vietnamese soldier could be. He took on the most dangerous of tasks, defusing bombs before later becoming a commando soldier and a political commissar. However the tragedy of losing comrades on the battlefield has long since been overshadowed by the tragedy that has befallen his family after the end of the war. Mr. Diu and his wife Niec have lost 12 of their 15 children as a result of the effects of Agent Orange. Their one remaining daughter Hang, one of three million people affected by Agent Orange, has been sent from the hospital to die. Her parents desperately looking for a remedy have turned to traditional medicine.

Mr Doan Tihn

Is one of the most well known war photographers in Vietnam. He is famous for his pictures from the most brutal battle zones in Vietnam. He was one of the very few who photographed the besieged citadel in the city of Quang Tri from the inside and came out alive. He readily acknowledges that his pictures from the war only show happy smiling soldiers from the North Vietnamese side - because they were chosen as part of a massive propaganda effort directed at enticing young people to join the war machine. "They were essential to strengthen the resolve to win the war". No pictures that showed the horrors of war were allowed. He tells moving stories about these other pictures of the carnage of war, of the wounded and dying that has never been shown. He himself has never had the control of the negatives - and always had to hand them over to the authorities.