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## Finding a Survivor, or Perhaps a Fraud

‘Unclaimed’ Explores the Identity of a Vietnam War Veteran

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS MAY 1, 2014

The flashier of the two stories in “Unclaimed,” Michael Jorgensen’s intensely moving documentary, is about a man claiming to be a long-missing Vietnam War veteran. Quietly shadowing this central identity quest, however, is a less attention-grabbing but perhaps even more compelling tale of how one man from a broken home finds peace and purpose in reconstructing the home of another.

A tragic childhood and two tours in Vietnam left Tom Faunce with a powerful dose of survivor guilt. So when he heard about the possible existence of a former comrade while doing humanitarian work in Southeast Asia in 2008, he had to investigate.

“Why did I make it when so many others didn’t?” he wondered, determined to learn whether a poor Vietnamese citizen in his 70s was actually John Hartley Robertson, an Army Special Forces soldier whose helicopter had crashed in 1968 during a covert mission in the Laotian jungle. Tall, stooped and seamed, the would-be Mr. Robertson (who was officially listed as killed in action) spoke no English and appeared to have only spotty memories of his past.

Shooting in 2012 in Vietnam, Canada and the United States, Mr. Jorgensen sucks us into the emotional vortex of a controversial investigation provoked by either an abandoned hero or a mysterious fraud. Surviving relatives and brothers-in-arms of Mr. Robertson are unearthed and scientific tests conducted, but the film’s many dangling threads — including conflicting DNA claims and a reference to accusations of government mismanagement of missing-in-action cases — are obscured by a crescendo of sentiment that’s hard to resist.

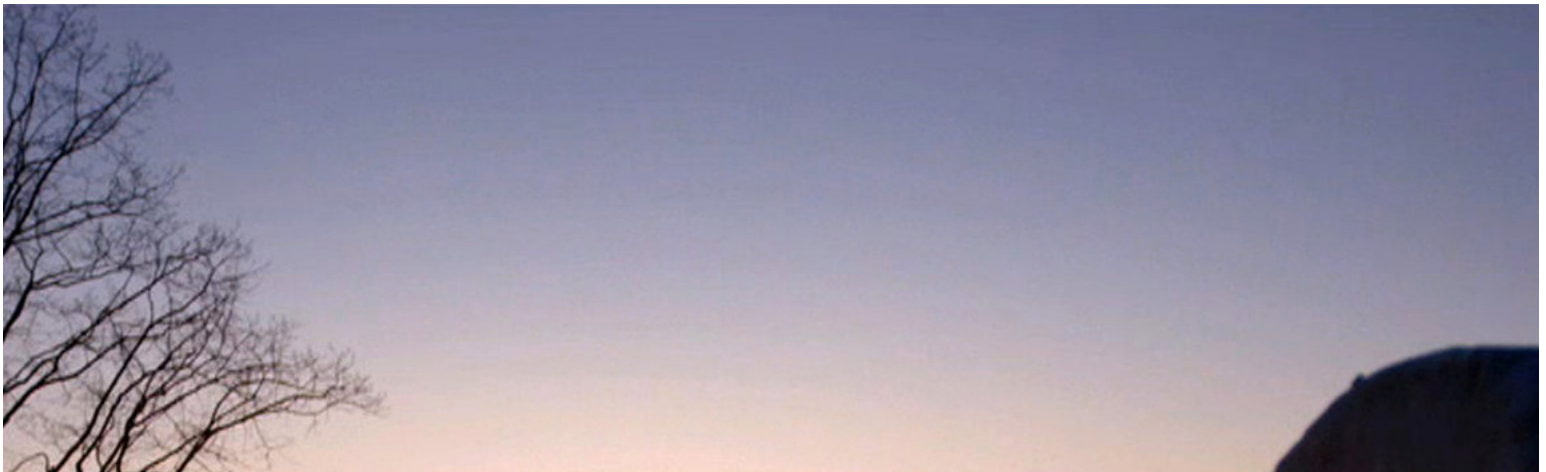
If we brush aside the unanswered questions, what we’re left with is a simple tale of two men: One who may have been lost, and one who only felt that way.

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