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## BACKGROUND BOOKS

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### VIETNAM

As the *New York Times's* Fox Butterfield wrote after the Wilson Center's Vietnam history conference last January, "a small group of scholars, journalists, and military specialists . . . have started to look afresh at the war."

In so doing, examining new documentation, they have challenged many of the old claims of the "hawks" and, more notably, of the antiwar "doves" whose views largely prevailed in academe and book publishing and often gained media acceptance during and after the turmoil of the Vietnam years.

Perhaps the first apolitical "revisionist" study was *Tet!* (1971) by *Washington Post* veteran Don Oberdorfer, who concluded, as most historians do now, that the Communists' spectacular 1968 Tet Offensive was a defeat for Hanoi in South Vietnam, even as it demoralized political Washington. In *The Unmaking of a President* (1977), Herbert Schandler, a retired Army colonel and one of the authors of the *Pentagon Papers*, followed up with a scholarly, eye-opening dissection of Washington decision-making during the hectic February-March 1968 period. Another *Postman*, Peter Braestrup, analyzed press and TV performance during the Tet drama; he found that journalists had been overwhelmed by this *Big Story* (1977) and too hastily portrayed what turned out to be a Communist setback as a battlefield disaster for the allies.

A major contribution to understanding how the United States got into Vietnam came from Richard Betts (see p. 94) and Leslie Gelb, director of the *Pentagon Papers* project

and now a *New York Timesman* in Washington. In *The Irony of Vietnam* (1979), Betts and Gelb undercut one widespread notion that the press itself had fostered: that Lyndon Johnson secretly decided on massive escalation in Vietnam even as he seemed to promise the contrary during his 1964 presidential campaign. Working with newly released documents at the LBJ Library in Austin, political scientist Larry Berman followed up with a closer examination of LBJ's decisions and hesitations during the 1965 escalation in *Planning a Tragedy* (1982); he is now working on a sequel covering the 1966-68 period.

American hopes for a negotiated settlement only led to confusion, wrote political scientist Allan Goodman in *The Lost Peace* (1978), a history of U.S. peace "feelers" and peace talks with Hanoi. The North Vietnamese had told Washington from the outset, Goodman added, that there was really "nothing to negotiate"; victory, not the prewar status quo, was the North Vietnamese objective.

Relying partly on newly obtainable military files, Guenter Lewy, a political scientist at the University of Massachusetts, produced a controversial, data-packed study of *America in Vietnam* (1978). Even as he criticized U.S. tactics and described South Vietnam's long ordeal (including 300,000 civilian deaths), Lewy concluded that Americans did not wage an "immoral" or unusually destructive war in the South, or engage in "terror bombing" of the North, as alleged by the Left.

Memoirs aside, few U.S. military

men have dwelt, at book-length, on the lessons of the war. However, Colonel Harry Summers (see p. 125) broke the ice in 1981 with *On Strategy*, an attempt to prod his fellow officers (and civilian policy-makers) into re-reading the maxims of Clausewitz as they applied to the U.S. failure in Vietnam.

And a former critic of the war, *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz, stirred up a storm in literary Manhattan by exhuming the wartime statements of the New Left and analyzing *Why We Were in Vietnam* (1982). It was not "immoral" to help the South Vietnamese defend themselves against Hanoi, he argued, but it was probably impossible, given the circumstances, to win.

None of these books is the last word. Much territory remains to be explored. Many complex issues need added investigation.

The further study of the conduct of the war (especially after 1968) has been limited by the slow—and slowing—rate of declassification of official U.S. documents, and the reticence of some major figures. Lyndon Johnson, Henry Kissinger, and Richard Nixon have done their memoirs. But none has been forthcoming from Dean Rusk or Robert S. McNamara (who, unlike Rusk, declines even to discuss Vietnam). Moreover,

no great enthusiasm has been shown by private foundations or universities for Vietnam studies using the sizable archival resources that now *are* open to scholars.

Even so, research is being done. Journalist Arnold Isaacs is writing *Without Honor*, a study of the fall of South Vietnam. Political scientist Timothy J. Lomperis will soon publish a critique of the oft-cited "revolutionary" aspects of Hanoi's war in the South, *Vietnam: The War Everyone Lost—and Won*. Editor Robert Manning is shepherding an illustrated multivolume history, *The Vietnam Experience*, for Boston Publishing Company. Newsman Neil Sheehan is finishing a biography of John Paul Vann, the archetypal U.S. adviser in Vietnam. Journalist Stanley Karnow is completing a fresh survey, *Vietnam, A History*.

Keeping track of such efforts—as well as of contemporary affairs—is Douglas Pike (see p. 114). His quarterly *Indochina Chronology* newsletter is available free by writing to Professor Pike, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720.

The armed services have employed by far the largest number of historians devoted to chronicling the Vietnam War, especially U.S. combat experience. The Army published a



series of monographs of uneven quality (on the Special Forces, riverine tactics, etc.) during the 1970s; its 16-volume official history of the war will only start appearing later in this decade, in the tradition of its massive, highly regarded accounts of World War II and Korea.

The Marine Corps has published three volumes of its war history (through 1966); the Air Force and Navy have moved more slowly. A "Select Bibliography of Department

of Defense Publications of the Southeast Asia Conflict" is available by writing LTC A. G. Traas, Histories Division, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. 20314.

A lengthy essay on Vietnam books was published in *The Wilson Quarterly* ("Vietnam as History," Spring 1978), too early to include James Webb's *Fields of Fire* and several other first-rate combat novels. However, most of the books listed below were cited in that essay.

#### A SHORT VIETNAM BOOKLIST

*History, Memoirs, Journalism, Polemics, and Fiction*

Air War Study Group, Cornell Univ., **The Air War in Indochina** (Beacon, rev. ed., 1972); Michael Arlen, **Living Room War** (Viking, 1969).

Larry Berman, **Planning a Tragedy** (Norton, 1982); Douglas Blaufarb, **The Counter-Insurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance** (Free Press, 1977); Anthony T. Bouscaren, ed., **All Quiet on the Eastern Front: The Death of South Vietnam** (Devin-Adair, 1976); Richard Boyle, **The Flower of the Dragon: The Breakdown of the U.S. Army in Vietnam** (Ramparts, 1972); Peter Braestrup, **Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington** (Yale, rev. ed., 1983); Jack Broughton, **Thud Ridge** (Lippincott, 1969); C. D. Bryan, **Friendly Fire** (Putnam's, 1976); Josiah Bunting, **The Lionheads** (Braziller, 1972); Joseph L. Buttinger, **Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled** (Praeger, 1967), **Vietnam: The Unforgettable Tragedy** (Horizon, 1976).

Philip Caputo, **A Rumor of War** (Holt, 1977); Michael Charlton and Anthony Moncrieff, **Many Reasons Why: The American Involvement in Vietnam** (Hill & Wang, 1978); Charles Coe, **Young Man in Vietnam** (Four Winds Press, 1968); John L. Cook, **The Advisor** (Dorrance, 1973); Chester L. Cooper, **The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam** (Dodd, 1970).

William J. Duiker, **The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam** (Westview, 1981); Dennis J. Duncanson, **Government and Revolution in**

**Vietnam** (Oxford, 1968); Van Tien Dung, **Our Great Spring Victory** (Monthly Review, 1977).

Frank Callihan Elkins, **The Heart of a Man** (Norton, 1973); Gloria Emerson, **Winners and Losers** (Random, 1976).

Bernard Fall, **Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu** (Lippincott, 1966), **Street Without Joy: Insurgency in Indochina, 1946-63** (Stackpole, rev. ed., 1963), **The Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis** (Praeger, rev. ed., 1964); Frances FitzGerald, **Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam** (Little, Brown, 1972); Charles B. Flood, **The War of the Innocents** (McGraw-Hill, 1970).

Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts, **The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked** (Brookings, 1979); Allan E. Goodman, **The Lost Peace: America's Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War** (Hoover, 1978), **Politics in War: The Bases of Political Community in South Vietnam** (Harvard, 1973); Zalin Grant, **Survivors** (Norton, 1975); Sen. Mike Gravel, ed., **The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam** (Beacon, 1971).

David Halberstam, **The Best and the Brightest** (Random, 1972), **The Making of a Quagmire** (Random, 1965), **One Very Hot Day** (Houghton, 1967); P. Edward Haley, **Congress and the Fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia** (Assoc. Univ.

- Presses, 1982); Larry Heinemann, *Close Quarters* (Farrar, 1977); James B. Hendry, *The Small World of Khanh Hau* (Aldine, 1964); Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (Knopf, 1977); George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (Wiley, 1979); Seymour Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (Random, 1970); Gerald Hickey, *Village in Vietnam* (Yale, 1964); *Sons of the Mountains* (Yale, 1982); *Free in the Forest* (Yale, 1982); John G. Hubbell et al., *P.O.W.: A Definitive History of the American Prisoner of War Experience in Vietnam, 1964-1973* (Reader's Digest Press, 1976); Ken Hurwitz, *Marching Nowhere* (Norton, 1971).
- Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-69* (Holt, 1971); Ward S. Just, *To What End: Report from Vietnam* (Houghton, 1968).
- Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (Harper, 1976); Steven Kelman, *Push Comes to Shove: The Escalation of Student Protest* (Houghton, 1970); Douglas Kinard, *The War Managers* (Univ. Press of New Eng., 1977); Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Little, Brown, 1979); *Years of Upheaval* (Little, Brown, 1982); Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam* (Rand, 1972); David Kraslow and Stuart Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam* (Random, 1968); Nguyen Cao Ky, *Twenty Years and Twenty Days* (Stein & Day, 1976).
- Anthony Lake, ed., *The Vietnam Legacy: The War, American Society and the Future of American Foreign Policy* (N.Y. Univ., 1976); Daniel Lang, *Casualties of War* (McGraw-Hill, 1969); Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (Oxford, 1978); Don Luce and John Sommer, *Vietnam: The Unheard Voices* (Cornell, 1969).
- S.L.A. Marshall, *Ambush* (Cowles, 1969), *Bird* (Cowles, 1968), *The Fields of Bamboo* (Dial, 1971), *West to Cambodia* (Cowles, 1968); John T. McAlister, *Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution* (Knopf, 1969); John T. McAlister and Paul Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution* (Harper, 1970); Harvey Meyerson, *Vinh Long* (Houghton, 1970); John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (Wiley, 1973).
- Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (Grosset, 1978).
- Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!* (Doubleday, 1971); Tim O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato* (Delacorte, 1978); *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (Delacorte, 1973); Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War Revisited* (Westview, 1979).
- D. R. Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet: U.S.-Vietnam in Perspective* (Presidio, 1978); Howard R. Penniman, *Elections in South Vietnam* (American Enterprise Institute, 1973); Douglas Pike, *History of Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1976* (Hoover, 1978), *The Vietcong Strategy of Terror* (U.S. Mission, Saigon, 1970), *War, Peace, and the Viet Cong* (MIT, 1969), *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (MIT, 1966); Robert Pisor, *The End of the Line: The Siege of Khe Sanh* (Norton, 1982); Norman Podhoretz, *Why We Were in Vietnam* (Simon & Schuster, 1982); Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Univ. of Calif., 1979); Thomas Powers, *The War at Home: Vietnam and the American People, 1964-1968* (Grossman, 1973).
- Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Univ. of Calif., 1971); Walt Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power: An Essay in Recent History* (Macmillan, 1972).
- Harrison E. Salisbury, *Behind the Lines: Hanoi, December 23-January 7* (Harper, 1967); Al Santoli, *Everything We Had* (Random, 1981); Herbert Y. Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam* (Princeton, 1977); Jonathan Schell, *The Military Half: An Account of Destruction in Quang Ngai and Quang Tin* (Knopf, 1968); Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution: The U.S. in Vietnam, 1946-1966* (Harper, rev. ed., 1966), *The Road From War: Vietnam, 1965-1970* (Harper, 1970); U.S.G. Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam* (Government Printing Office, 1969); Susan Sheehan, *Ten Vietnamese* (Knopf, 1967); Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam* (Random, 1977); Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Presidio, 1982).
- W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell, eds., *The Lessons of Vietnam* (Crane, Russak, 1977); Robert F. Turner, *Vietnamese Communism: Its Origins and Development* (Hoover, 1975).
- Sidney Verba et al., *Vietnam and the Silent Majority: The Dove's Guide* (Harper, 1970); Sandy Vogelgesang, *The Long Dark Night of the Soul: The American Intellectual Left and the Vietnam War* (Harper, 1974).
- James Webb, *Fields of Fire* (Prentice-Hall, 1978); F. J. West, *The Village* (Harper, 1972); William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Doubleday, 1976).