

**OUR “PRE-SPONSE”
TO THE
KEN BURNS/PBS
DOCUMENTARY
ON THE
VIETNAM WAR**



DRAFT COPY

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*Dedicated to all those who served
in the noble and valiant effort to turn back
the forces of aggression and tyranny
in Vietnam and Southeast Asia,
all the men and women of our armed forces –
and the many civilians too
who played important roles,
and of course our South Vietnamese allies
and those of other nations who joined in that effort,
and – perhaps especially – all their families.
Thank you, my brothers and sisters.*

And just one thing more: It didn't have to end that way.

Lewis Sorley, October 28, 2014

Adapted from an address at the Army Navy Club

"The Wall reminds us to be honest in our telling of history. There is nothing to be gained by glossing over the darker portions of a war ... that bitterly divided America. We must openly acknowledge past mistakes, and we must learn from past mistakes, because that is how we avoid repeating past mistakes."

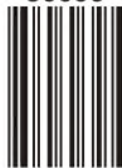
– Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, in his 2014 Veterans Day remarks at the Vietnam Memorial.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the worldwide Cultural Revolution of the Sixties, we have accepted, and allowed our children to be taught, mis-information – outright lies – about ourselves, our country and the world, in a manner which has undermined our national character and culture perhaps irretrievably. The Vietnam War was both the precipitating factor as well as the root of this propagandization and is therefore the necessitating starting point for any corrective action to be taken.

I recently received the following from a friend:

“...fully agree with outlook for future and an even more distorted and warped portrayal of history. What I've seen in schools is appalling. It may very well get worse. Right now Ken Burns, famed PBS documentarian, is working on VN "documentary." He's been underway for over a year and has scheduled telecast date sometime in 2017. Initial indicators do not give room for optimism. Have heard some ominous observations from some who've been interviewed, and have other indications that Burns will "go Karnow," and that will be an unmitigated disaster, for several reasons:

- Burns is famous, has great credibility, and is widely known to TV-viewing (non-book-reading) U.S. public.
- If he "goes Karnow"..... (or Sheehan) it will serve as the epoxy catalyst to forever case-harden nonsense passed off as Viet Nam "history" for next 20 years.

“This could be a very dangerous situation....”

Those of our who were distressed about the Stanley Karnow/PBS “Television History of the Vietnam War” have even more reason to look forward to the Ken Burns/PBS documentary on the same topic with even greater concern. Scholarship on the subject has become, over the intervening thirty years, even more polarized, with the “Liberal Orthodox” faction of academia admitting to Marxist/Maoist tendencies and becoming even less tolerant of what they perceive to be “Revisionism.”

We have reached out to the Burns “team” through multiple channels, answering questions, providing sources and expressing concern, but as yet we have no evidence of the content of this production. The facile dismissal of our concerns by the people with whom we have communicated just adds to our foreboding. As a result, we are compiling and distributing these notes to catalogue our fears. We will use our website, www.VVFH.org, to respond rapidly to each Burns telecast, critique and evaluate the installment for its historical integrity...or lack thereof. It

was easy to show the gross flaws and shortcomings in the previous PBS/Karnow nonsense. Our website: should handle viewer questions directed to it --Interactive and all that.-- We will try, if we heighten someone's curiosity, to respond, providing additional books, sources, etc.

We will also maintain a real time twitter based critique, while the program airs, at #BURNS VIETNAM [or other]

This is also an opportunity, and perhaps our best ever. The simple reason is we can clearly show that America's premier documentarian can't get things right. It would not be a matter of yelling back and forth but rather a thorough dissection and documentation of the episode, its flaws, its good points. In any case, we've got our work cut out for us, and we're already behind the eight-ball.

If we have over-reacted, we will congratulate the producers, if our fears are confirmed, we will use the website to critique the program, correct the mis-information, stimulate reaction by Veteran and Vietnamese-American communities throughout the country and to lobby for the opportunity to have "equal time" to respond.

We will coordinate resources, materials, speakers and financing to accomplish what may well be one of the final battles of the Vietnam War. If you would like to contribute in any way, please reach out to Vietnam Veterans for Factual History through our website noted above and by voicing your concerns to others in order to engage them in this fight.



Series Editor: Stephen Sherman



Ken Burns has endorsed **American Reckoning**; a book edited by Christian Appy, a leftist history professor at hard-left U. Mass Amherst. Burns' endorsement is: "Few people understand the centrality of the Vietnam War to our situation as much as Christian Appy." All the more reason for our concern.

What Do We Have a Right to Expect in Burns' Television History of the Second Indochina War?

The first thing we have a right to expect is that it will acknowledge that the so-called “Vietnam” War was not confined to North and South Vietnam. It included Laos and Cambodia, which together with northern Vietnam (Tonkin), central Vietnam (Annam), and southern Vietnam (Cochin China) comprised the former French Indochina. The First Indochina War was from 1946 to 1954, and the Second Indochina War was from 1954 to 1975. The distinctly American Phase of the Second Indochina War was from 1965 to 1973.

The second thing we have a right to expect is that it will emphatically acknowledge that the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) were equally sovereign nations and were recognized as such by other nations, just as East Germany and West Germany were. Therefore, a war between two sovereign nations is not primarily a civil war, and the invasion of one sovereign nation by another sovereign nation is not primarily an insurgency.

The third thing we have a right to expect is that it will emphatically acknowledge that the war was primarily an invasion of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia by the North Vietnamese Army. The insurgency in South Vietnam was planned, initiated, and controlled by the North Vietnamese Politburo as the first stage of their three-stage strategy to conquer South Vietnam by achieving military hegemony in Laos and Cambodia.

The first stage of their strategy was terrorism and guerrilla warfare. The second stage was semi-conventional, mobile warfare. The third stage was conventional, positional warfare. In 1975, two years after all U.S. combat forces had been withdrawn, the North Vietnamese Army invaded South Vietnam again and conquered it with conventional forces using conventional tactics, not with Viet Cong guerrilla forces using unconventional tactics.

The fourth thing we have a right to expect is that it will acknowledge that the U.S. military forces were never militarily defeated in Vietnam by either the VC or the NVA forces, nor were they ever fought to a military stalemate by those forces. The VC forces were militarily ravaged in 1968, and the NVA forces were militarily ravaged in 1972. In 1975, the

South Vietnamese army, not the U.S. army, was militarily defeated by the invading North Vietnamese Army.

The fifth thing we have a right to expect is that it will acknowledge that the Communist regime in Vietnam is one of the most corrupt, cruel, and repressive in the world.

The sixth thing we have a right to expect is that it will acknowledge that the historians who stress those facts are academically ostracized as "revisionists" by the "orthodox" historians, whose knowledge of the war is primarily based on the reporting of a few highly influential, politically prejudiced, and militarily ignorant journalists in Saigon during the war.

A basic knowledge of the factual history of the Vietnam War is still important for Americans today, because no other conflict in the 20th Century had a greater or more lasting negative impact on American society. The failure of national leadership in that war cannot be avoided in the future, if the American electorate does not know the basic facts that led to that failure. To learn those facts, Americans must first unlearn all the nonfactual myths about the war propagated during and after it by a combination of military ignorance and adversarial leftist ideology.

The Vietnam War continues to have a powerful symbolic value in the minds of most Americans. It was the catalyst for the emergence of a fundamental cultural divide and the cultural dominance of a militant Leftist value system in America. That mentality has no interest in the objective facts of the war, because propagation of that point of view means that in practice, and writing, facts are irrelevant to conclusions already determined and propagated. For many of those who follow this practice, they believe the source of most of the evils in the world is the U.S. political and economic system.

A relatively recent example of the negative effects of the widespread, belief in nonfactual myths about the Vietnam War is the First Gulf War. Saddam Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait in 1990 was the direct result of his belief that U.S. threats to defend Kuwait had no credibility. He held that belief, because the U.S. government made the same threats to North Vietnam and the same promises to its South Vietnamese ally, yet refused to intervene, when North Vietnam conquered South Vietnam in 1975. The price we paid for losing our international credibility in Vietnam was the necessity to earn it again in another war.



James McLeroy



Why We (America/History) Don't Need a Remake of the Karnow Television History Series

*"It ain't so much people being ignorant as them knowing things
that ain't so."* *Mark Twain*

The first lesson for application to study of the Vietnam War should be that you cannot derive any valid Lessons Learned if you don't acknowledge and understand the underlying facts. The second lesson is that most of the "facts" you are hearing from Academia, Media, Entertainment and even the Federal bureaucracy today have been filtered by partisans or their acolytes who regard any dissent from the "party line" as "revisionism," which must be stamped out. They have little or no interest in hearing "the other side" of the arguments or for considering evidence contrary to their positions. The third lesson is that the primary argument heard from the conventional side of the table is that the United States either acted foolishly or, going further, out of neo-imperialist motivations, or, at the extreme, is the focus of evil in this world and was punished in Vietnam to atone for its sins. If you accept any of these premises, you slide down a cascade of dangerous mis-truths promoted to show that our intentions and actions in Vietnam were wrong and doomed. For many opponents of the US role in Vietnam, it was insufficient for us to merely withdraw, we had to hand over the people of Indochina to the communists, notwithstanding that the Vietnamese Communist Party were more totalitarian, corrupt, imperialist, and vindictive than the Diem or Thieu governments. Yes, we made mistakes in Vietnam, especially the coup against Diem, and the failure to completely block from Khe Sanh west to the Mekong at Savanakheth, the communist resupply and replacement road system. But our underlying principles contained the dominoes to Indochina, gave ASEAN breathing space and led to the end of the Soviet Union. Our failure to stop the North Vietnamese is a cause for regret by many Vietnamese of both the South and the North and was specifically abetted by the so-called "American Peace Movement," whose many innocents or avoiders of the draft were a tool of communist propaganda from their earliest beginnings.

By our failure to maintain an "invincible" reputation, we have allowed tyranny and terror to thrive without fear of the "paper tiger" we have allowed ourselves become. And that devaluation of reputation has

indeed encouraged anti-democratic forces around the globe from then to now.

The Karnow series [see the article which follows] reinforced the conventional party line already adhered to by many historians and writers.

At a minimum, the Ken Burns production will be a technologically superior production to the Karnow series, eye candy that risks nourishing the already decaying roots of historical scholarship.

I think there will be nothing new in Burn's version of the Vietnam War. I predict it will be the same "old time religion" of the Liberal Left that Lien-Hang paid obeisance to in her book ("there is general agreement that the American people were wrongly led to embark on a protracted and unwinnable war in Southeast Asia")¹. Ken Burns impressionistic, and I believe, intellectually superficial version of the Civil War is the same technique he will use for the Vietnam War, which he neither experienced nor has demonstrated understanding in depth. The message in it, whether explicit or implicit, may well be straight Karnow with the possible inclusion of some Liberal-Orthodox stuff, i.e., unwinnable, unnecessary, immoral, illegal, and tragic for both Vietnam and the US, not because of what the Communists did, but because of what the US did.



R.J. Del Vecchio



Burns' treatment of the Civil War was intellectually simplistic and grossly misrepresented the Southern motivation as being nothing more than pro-slavery, despite the fact that only a very small fraction of the Confederate combatants were slave owners and very few of them had any direct connection to slavery. The Second Indochina War was vastly more complex than the U.S. Civil War, so if Burns could or would not cope with the complexity of the latter, he can hardly be expected to do so with the former.

¹ Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, University of North Carolina Press, 2012, p. 7.

What was Wrong with Karnow's *Viet Nam*

"Whatever it is – it isn't history [find quote]."

Douglas Pike

Stanley Karnow's *Viet Nam-A History* is a prime, if not the primary, example of commercial history that is little more than a melodramatic impressionistic collage rather than a hard history edifying its readers. This 670 page opus, itself serving as the core of the PBS television series, comes across as the ne plus ultra complete and definitive study of Hanoi's War, and has been accepted as such in innumerable college classes, to include those at West Point. Unfortunately the book itself is no more accurate than American misperceptions of Viet Nam, and it is this latter ignorance which allows the former to earn the plaudits it has received as the end-all, be-all of Viet Nam histories. Readers with little background information, and even those who have some rudimentary grasp of history, are unable to detect the multitude of flaws and sloppy history contained in *Viet Nam-A History*. A critique such as applied to the textbook reviewed earlier could also be applied to Karnow's work, and it would number hundreds of pages, citing hundreds of instances in which Karnow has put his own spin on a history he does not comprehend to begin with. What the reader receives from Karnow is much the same as would be delivered by professional football players discussing gardening, or a gardening club discussing football. Whether one likes, or dislikes, gardening or football is not the point, which is that one can hardly expect to emerge from either discussion well-informed. Karnowian shortcomings assume many forms: factual omission and error, creative and selective editing, and inability or unwillingness to recognize and report on very significant events and developments.

Even a sample of Karnow's factual errors, are found throughout the book. would be too long to include here, but can be found at www.vvfh.org/Karnow.htm

Karnow compendium of clichés demonstrates a distinct inability to analyze data and information, a primary skill requirement for competent historians, a geographic and mathematical illiteracy, a shallow grasp of and disrespect for Viet Nameese and Southeast Asian culture and religions.

Viet Nam's superficiality is clearly evident in the last two chapters, which purport to describe events from 1968 to 1975 in a total of 81 pages. It was during this time that heretofore unanticipated developments

materialized and nature of the war changed radically. Collapse of the VC/NLF, GVN land reform, rise in VC defectors, demonstrable increases in rural security and economic security, inexcusably belated formation of a coordinating agency for all pacification activities (CORDS, not mentioned in book), the 1972 NVA invasion a la German Wehrmacht, the significant frustration of same, Cambodian incursion, etc., all took place in this period, yet are largely unexplained. Of the 81 total pages, approximately 16 deal with the war itself and in a most cursory fashion. Most of Karnow's narrative sifts through political maneuvering, peace (sic) talks, American domestic politics, protesters, and other tangential matters that derive from the war but do not provide insight or edification on the war itself. Sixteen pages of military exposition purporting to explain the war, and in the words of the book jacket, in a book that "clarifies, analyzes and demystifies...." Hardly. Little of the 1968-1975 period is explained or analyzed, and Karnow's 16 pages of narrative cannot be expected to contain sufficient information for a reader to gain any meaningful comprehension. Little is clarified, analyzed or demystified. Much is concealed, occluded and misconstrued. Overall, Viet Nam-A History is at best a ludicrously oversimplified "bluffer's guide" to Viet Nam, Hanoi's war, and allied efforts to stop it. Further, its infatuation with Hanoi's "nationalist," all "having warmth," "charm," and "flair" is hardly the stuff of serious history. Moreover, the renowned television series, based in part on the book, is similarly flawed and does not stand up under logical, critical examination. Were there to be an intellectual court of inquiry, both the book and the series would be thrown out for egregious departures from sound historical research and analysis. A definitive analysis of shortcomings abounding in the accompanying television series is found in James Banerian's *Losers Are Pirates*.¹ Banerian examines the thirteen part series in sequence, dissecting and systematically shredding it with well documented factual information, leaving a residue clearly revealed as little more than a compendium of clichés, blended together with the usual massive exclusions and selective editing. In sum, a fraud. Banerian concludes

"The failures of the *Television History* are many and sometimes astonishing in scope. The program insults the people of Southeast Asia and makes a mockery of the suffering and grief they have endured as a result of war....Research for the program was narrowly confined to the space provided by prejudices of the producers. Interviewees were abused through contrived editing....All of this makes *Viet Nam: A Television*

History one of the most shameful products to come out of television broadcasting.... As for Karnow's companion book, not much can be said.....As a history of the war however, the \$20.00 volume has little value unless the reader is willing to spend hours checking the author's information, correcting inaccuracies and searching for more objective data. Still, the book is not completely worthless--the 700 page tome does make an impressive bookend."²

Both Karnow's book and the accompanying and widely acclaimed television series were and are fraudulent history, an assemblage of impressionistic anecdotal factoids, explaining little, analyzing nothing, and, if their inaccuracies and omissions were figuratively transmitted into construction blueprints, sufficient to drive building contractors into a madhouse or bankruptcy. The book and television series received broad popular acceptance. Both are widely used in high school and college courses on Viet Nam, yet both are demonstrably flawed to the extent that their most useful purpose is as illustrations of bungled and distorted pseudo-histories. In sum, *Viet Nam-A History* does not remotely resemble a "complete history," nor is it even history at all.



Bill Laurie



A Necessary War

Why the war was necessary strategically and ethically. What was the purpose it was intended to serve?

At various times and places the Second Indochina War (1954 to 1975) in South Vietnam had some aspects of a revolution, an insurgency, a guerrilla war, and a civil war. The orthodox thesis is that the U.S. war in Vietnam (1964-1973) was an illegal, immoral, unwinnable, and/or unnecessary intervention in an indigenous revolution or civil war. The "revisionist" thesis is that the war was not illegal, immoral, unwinnable, or unnecessary and was always primarily an incremental invasion of South Vietnam controlled by North Vietnam.

At first it was an indirect and covert invasion using small, irregular Viet Cong proxy forces. Later it was a direct and increasingly overt invasion using large, regular North Vietnamese Army units. After the Geneva Conference of 1954, between 80,000 and 90,000 Communist Viet Minh veterans had moved to North Vietnam and received training as agitation-propaganda teams and military cadre. Some 10,000 other Communist Viet Minh veterans were ordered to remain in South Vietnam.^{4 5}

In 1959, the first of some 4,500 Communist Viet Minh veterans were infiltrated back into South Vietnam to recruit, organize, and train the nucleus of the Viet Cong companies, battalions, and regiments. After all the Viet Minh veterans had been sent back, regular North Vietnamese Army cadre began to be sent for that purpose.⁶

Le Duan, First Secretary of the Lao Dong Party in Hanoi was "the architect, main strategist, and commander-in-chief of communist Vietnam's war effort"⁷ "... to seal their ... control over the war effort in the south, Le Duan and Le Duc Tho constructed a repressive Party hierarchy."⁸ "... the NLF ... had no choice but to follow Hanoi's orders."⁹ "If there ever was any doubt about who controlled the southern

⁴ Nguyen, Lien-Hang T.; *Hanoi's War*; University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, NC; 2012; p. 31.

⁵ Summers, Harry; *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War*; Houghton Mifflin, NY; 1995; p. 68

⁶ Davidson, Phillip; *Vietnam At War: The History, 1946-1975*; Presidio Press; Novato, CA; 1988; p. 289-290

⁷ Nguyen; *op cit.*; p. 2

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128

insurgency ... many ... newly declassified materials from Vietnam should lay the debate to rest."¹⁰

The issue is whether that debate should be laid to rest and if so, on the basis of what evidence. Although in dispute during much of the war, after “liberation” Hanoi repeatedly confirmed key reasons for U.S. intervention in the war. Ironically, official North Vietnamese histories and biographies, as well as the *Pentagon Papers*, had done the same earlier.

Why did America send military forces to Indochina? Because Ho Chi Minh had been a dedicated Communist for decades, including training in Moscow and nearly two decades of work for the Communist International before being sent back to Vietnam in May 1941 to set up the Viet Minh Front. After the war, Hanoi admitted the Vietnam “Workers” [Communist] Party had made a decision to open the Ho Chi Minh Trail on May 19, 1959, and began sending troops, equipment and supplies into South Vietnam to overthrow its government by force. While the aggression was covert, it was every bit as illegal as North Korea’s 1950 invasion to conquer South Korea by force.

Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Vice Chairman Lin Biao declared in 1965 that the struggle in Vietnam was a “test case” that would demonstrate that the United States had no effective response to “peoples’ warfare,” and a victory there would set the stage for other “Vietnams” throughout the Third World. Cuba’s Che Guevara similarly declared the struggle in Vietnam would decide the future of revolution in the Americas. China was sending advisers, weapons, and money to Communist revolutionary groups throughout Southeast Asia and as far away as Mozambique. Thailand and Indonesia were economic and political basket cases, ripe for conquest. Our efforts in Vietnam prevented that.

While we were fighting in Vietnam, China turned inward during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and abandoned its exporting of revolution in the process. But had America not come to South Vietnam’s defense when we did, we might have faced a dozen “Vietnams” with the option of watching Chinese-armed Marxist-Leninist groups take control of one country at a time or resorting to nuclear weapons. We could not possibly have won a dozen such conflicts with conventional forces. Evidence that America had no answer to “peoples’ warfare” would also likely have persuaded Third World leaders to try to cut the best deal they could with the Communists for their own survival. By the time we finally

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128

abandoned our solemn treaty commitments and promises in Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia were strong enough to survive on their own.

The purpose of the war was at its core quite simple: to assist in the defense of victims of armed aggression. We did not always explain it well, and we certainly made some tragic mistakes along the way. But, as President Reagan observed, it was “a noble cause.” Was it “ethical”? Examine the consequences of our withdrawal. Throughout Indochina, tens of millions of people lost any chance at human freedom, and millions of others lost their lives. Following “liberation,” more people died in the Cambodian “killing fields” (Google “Yale Cambodian Genocide”), South Vietnamese “reeducation camps,” “new economic zones,” and as “boat people,” than had died in combat in the previous 14 years. The respected human rights organization Freedom House rated the Socialist Republic of Vietnam among the “dirty dozen” and “worst of the worst” human rights violators for decades after “liberation.” We fought to stop aggression and to protect the lives and chance for freedom of our allies. Americans should take pride in what we tried to do.



Prof. Robert F Turner



A Winnable War

Throughout the U. S. involvement in the Indochina Wars, the U. S. always had the military capability to bring the war to an acceptable political conclusion. However, it never had a cogent strategy for doing so and failed to adopt a workable strategy once the failure of the American strategy was apparent. Briefly, the U. S. failed to adopt a strategy that maximized the military capabilities of its own forces and those of its allies, and this failure led to a diminished will on the part of the American people. The reasons for this strategic failure were manifold and began with the earliest involvement of the U. S. in Indochina after World War II.

In 1954, President Eisenhower, having been elected on the heels of a no-win “police action” in Korea, chose not to save the French from defeat at Diem Bien Phu and he counseled President Kennedy that Laos was the real determinant in dealing with the expansion of communism in SE Asia. Kennedy, whose Inaugural address codified the importance of the struggle against “Wars of National Liberation,” chose to negotiate his way out of a confrontation with North Vietnam over Laos, but directing Averill Harriman in 1962 to negotiate with the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China and North Vietnam, to secure a treaty that would ensure the neutrality of Laos and Cambodia. This agreement would have effectively prevented the communists from using Laos and Cambodia for the infiltration of men and supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, but only if the communists lived up to the agreement. However, they had no intention of doing so and, in effect, turned the eastern portions of these two countries into a massive base and transport system, known commonly as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. By this act of communist perfidy, the North Vietnamese communists were able to establish sanctuaries along the entire western border of South Vietnam, a distance of over 1400 kilometers, making the defense of this border virtually impossible to defend with the military forces available to the South Vietnamese government.

This strategic misque was compounded by the Kennedy administration in 1963 when it promoted the assassination of the President of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem. This massive political blunder effectively removed the only real nationalist leader with Vietnam-wide credentials and replaced him with a coterie of ineffective military officers with virtually no national following outside the military. President Johnson made a bad policy worse when he assigned the pacification mission to

General Westmoreland, forcing Westmoreland to conduct two wars simultaneously: A conventional war against the North Vietnamese and main force VC units, and a counterinsurgency war in the villages and hamlets of rural South Vietnam, thus doubling the American manpower requirements for the war, and assigning a mission to American combat units that they were neither trained nor suited for. In addition, he refused to consider a ground invasion of southern Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail, this allowing the communists to infiltrate men and supplies at will, despite abundance evidence that air power and indigenous guerrilla forces were unable to stem this flow of men and arms south.

As a result, President Johnson spent the remainder of his term in office attempting to find a solution to the strategic dilemma facing him, a costly dilemma that had the potential to derail his “War on Poverty.” Due to the communist TET Offensive in early 1968, President Johnson and his national security staff gave up any attempt at forging a new strategy for the war and the Democratic Party’s left wing took advantage of this to bring about the downfall of President Johnson.

With the election of President Nixon in 1968, the options for the U. S. were effectively limited to finding a way out of the mess made by Kennedy and Johnson. The solution was “Vietnamization,” a term developed to convince the American people that the U. S. was turning the war over to the South Vietnamese to fight, while the U. S. would continue to provide advisory, logistical, and aviation support. From 1969 to 1972, this policy seemed to be working, as evidenced by the defeat of the communists on the battlefield during these years. Unfortunately, the peace accords signed in Paris in 1973 were not worth the paper they were written on since both the communists and the US Congress did not live up to the agreement. This culminated in an Anti-War Congress deciding it needed to help Hanoi win the war by cutting off funding for the South Vietnamese and preventing the US from using air power to assist the South Vietnamese. As a result, the South Vietnamese lacked the air support and critical supplies of ammunition and POL needed to defeat the 17 NVA divisions invading the south in 1975.

Even as late as 1975, the U. S. could have used its devastating air power against the North Vietnamese and stopped the invasion as it had done in 1972 when South Vietnamese ground troops, aided by massive U. S. air strikes, broke the invasion of South Vietnam that year. However, even had the U. S. possessed the will to employ its air power in 1975, it would only have achieved a temporary solution, since it would not have eliminated the enemy base camps and supply lines in Laos and Cambodia, thus continuing to expose South Vietnam’s 1400 kilometer

border to enemy infiltration. As long as the communists continued to disregard the Paris Peace Agreement and maintained their bases and supply lines along the length of South Vietnam’s border, they could resume their attacks against the South Vietnamese at some future date. However, then the question would have been how willing would the Soviet Union and China be to fully refurbish the North Vietnamese Army for at least the third time? It is instructive to remember that in 1978 China and Vietnam fought a three week war in which each side reported their adversary suffered more casualties than the U. S. incurred during a quarter century of war in S. E. Asia. Clearly, there would have been limits to the largesse of the Soviets and Chinese if North Vietnam continued to fail to conquer South Vietnam and required a continuous infusion of money and military equipment.

Any war is winnable if the country has the means, the will, and the proper strategy needed to achieve a decisive result. The United States clearly had the means to achieve victory in the Vietnam War; however, they employed a seriously flawed strategy that eroded the will of the American people and made it impossible after 1968 to apply the superior means available to achieve a decisive result.

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For further study of the question of whether the war was winnable or not, we highly recommend several books that address both the flawed U.S. strategy and the impact logistics played in the eventual defeat of South Vietnam. For an analysis of the flawed strategy, we recommend On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context by Col. Harry Summers, along with The Key to Failure: Laos and the Vietnam War by Norman B. Hannah. For an understanding of how the communist North Vietnamese logistics system allowed them to use base areas and sanctuaries during the First Indochina War, a system they used with great effect during the Second Indochina War, we recommend the recently published book by Charles R. Shrader, A War of Logistics: Parachutes and Porters in Indochina, 1945-54. We further recommend another recently published work by Major General Ira A. Hunt, Losing Vietnam: How America Abandoned Southeast Asia, which provides an extensive and detailed analysis of the disastrous impact Congress’s lack of funding for the South Vietnamese had on the ability of South Vietnam to defend itself against the communist invasion of 1975.



COL Andrew Finlayson (USMC, Ret.)



A Just War

It remains to be seen how Ken Burns will address the questions of atrocities in this conflict. Despite the writings of Nick Turse and other writers who have not kept their intense personal distaste for the war from affecting how they writes about it, the vast majority of American soldiers served honorably in a war that was being criticized by their peers who used their fervor for Hanoi as an excuse not to serve.

The Communists, on the other hand had a policy of murder and atrocity selectively applied for political/military effect.

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The plight of the Vietnamese and the other peoples of the Indochina peninsula needs to be properly addressed by Burns as well. More people were killed after April 1975 than were lost during the war itself. The Cambodian genocide, the Lao programs, the Boat People and the millions of people under the heel of a Communist kleptocracy today should be put in proper perspective. The death of the Republic of [South] Vietnam is best viewed in the writings of the “liberators:”

When sent south to “bring ‘the light’ to the southern compatriots who [we had been told] had lived in darkness and misery under the oppression of the Americans and their puppets... we went from one shock to another.” First accommodated in the Thien Loi Hotel in Cao Lanh, he could not believe his own eyes: “This was the first time we knew what it was to be in a real hotel, with its [porcelain] wash basin and flushing toilet bowl—a total novelty because in the whole city of Vinh and the whole province of Nghe An, in fact in the whole of North Vietnam at the time, we had nothing but open air septic holes as we needed the ‘human feces’ to fertilize our fields and increase production in accordance with the state initiative launched by General Nguyen Chi Thanh...” “I started to doubt the concept of ‘liberation of the South,’” he concluded. “Then followed the currency exchange campaigns, the offensive against the capitalists, the confiscation of many compatriots’ homes, then the waves after waves of people leaving Vietnam, including student teachers at our university also seeking their freedom abroad. The real meaning of the ‘southern liberation’ started sinking into me and I began to feel ashamed of all the years that I had lived in the blind illusions of a person who, after all, had been seen as an intellectual in society.” *Dr. Le Hien Duong, former Chancellor of Dong Thap University [in the South]*

*Arriving in Saigon, we had thought ourselves victorious
Little did we know that our faith simply crumbled
Once the lies and shams revealed themselves
In this open city of freedom and humanism.”*

Which led him to conclude in tears:

*“On the way back [North], earth and sky tumbled
I felt myself so guilty towards this southern land
I felt myself so ashamed in my conscience
And I cried, for myself as well as for the country.”*

Phan Huy, the pseudonym of a North Vietnamese Poet¹¹



**Michael
Lee
Lanning**



**Prof.
Nguyen
Ngoc Bich**



¹¹ Commentary and translations by the late Professor Nguyen Ngoc Bich.

OUR WRAP UP

Why does a factual Burns' docudrama about the Vietnam War matter?

Ken Burns is a talented storyteller credible to millions. His docudramas on the Civil War and Prohibition for examples combine historical photos, letters and contemporary music into dramatic narratives of American history. Ken Burns' histories touch heart and soul. The history of the controversial war in Vietnam is not settled. Ken Burns has a great opportunity to confront the prevailing myths about Vietnam.

Since the Sixties, we have taught our children many distorted views about the war and America. A Burns' factual history of the Vietnam War could be the essential starting point for corrections to America's story.

It will be difficult for Ken Burns to correct the false, but dominant orthodox histories, even if he wanted to. The orthodox view is that the war was illegal, immoral, unjust, unnecessary and unwinnable. The members of the Vietnam Veterans for a Factual History and their colleagues stand ready to help. Yet to date the Burns' team has summarily dismissed our alternative "revisionist" views.

Burns' collaborator, Gregory Ward, says America's ally, South Vietnam, was uniquely corrupt and inept, the war was unwinnable, and Vietnamese Communists were indistinguishable from Vietnamese nationalists. John Prados, writer of a "hidden history" of American fabrications about the unwinnable war, is an advisor to Burns. VVFH members can counter with the hidden history of Communist lies about the war. Will Burns accept the orthodox views of Prados' compatriots Stanley Karnow, and Neil Sheehan or of Marilyn Young and Howard Zinn? The latter tend to Marxist-Maoist narratives—America was the offending imperial, conquering power, not Hanoi, even though Moscow and Beijing supplied Hanoi's invasions.

Signature "proofs" of the evil war are wild stories about American Vietnam Vets. After being a baby butcher, he became a homeless, drug addicted, unemployed loser -- another victim of the war. In fact Vietnam vets are above average in education and life achievements and proud of their honorable service in Vietnam. Inmates of homeless shelters, mental institutions and prisons often claim falsely to be Vietnam vets, POWs, or Medal of Honor "winners" to steal the valor and VA benefits of real vets.

Seymour Hirsch, Nick Turse and others accuse us of routinely committing atrocities at Mai Lai etc. Yet Mai Lai was a rare event, investigated and prosecuted as the NVA butchery at Hue was not. Similarly

wild claims of American misuse of napalm should be contrasted the photos of roasted innocents at Dak Son. America had nothing to do with the naked napalm girl running down a road.

Burns might call upon Tom Hayden, Barry Romo, Neil Sheehan, Daniel Ellsberg and Howard Zinn to describe the peace movement. Pretty girls can be shown poking flowers into gun barrels at the Pentagon. Alongside ought to appear Jane Fonda sitting in the shooters chair at a Hanoi gun site or of others meeting the Viet Cong in conferences in Hanoi, Bratislava, Havana, Paris, Stockholm, etc.

With respect to the Cold War Burns should present eloquent witnesses such as Winston Churchill and Whitaker Chambers. To the allegation of the U.S. and South Vietnamese violations of the Geneva treaty of 1956, the allies did not sign the treaty and rightly refused to participate in phony communist elections in the more populous north.

To the mythology of Ho Chi Minh being a patriotic nationalist, the George Washington of Vietnam, one must see the photos in Ho's office of Stalin, Lenin, Marx, not Washington and Jefferson. Vietnamese historians know Ho murdered nationalists who opposed the communist conquest of Indochina.

Instead of declaring the war unwinnable and mocking Goldwater and Reagan, Burns could consult the work of Andrew Finlayson, Col. Harry Summers, or Gen. Ira A. Hunt for winning American strategies. While Walter Cronkite declared the Tet Offensive of 1968 a Communist victory, Burns ought not ignore the testimony of Gen. Westmoreland and Gen. Creighton Abrams and North Vietnamese sources, that Tet 1968 and the Easter offensive of 1972 were horrendous defeats costing Hanoi hundreds of thousands dead. Besides such oft-cited journalists as Peter Arnett, David Halberstam, Harrison Salisbury, Neil Sheehan, Morley Safer and Stanley Karnow, the Burns documentary would benefit from the work of Marguerite Higgins, Robert Elegant, Uwe Siemon-Netto and Guenter Lewy. If the Burns team uses I.F. Stone and Wilfred Burchett the audience ought to know both were paid agents of the Soviet Secret police, the KGB.

President Nixon, cast as the pitiless carpet bomber of Hanoi at Christmas 1972, can be vindicated by photos of a largely untouched Hanoi which had limited casualties. Surely, Burns will quote the many antiwar opponents of the US in Vietnam such as Prados, Young, Hayden. Burns might discover a Germantown conference after the peace treaty was signed in Paris in 1973. There and elsewhere the "peace" movement wanted the war to continue until the people of Indochina fell to commu-

nists. As tanks entered Saigon, Howard Zinn, Tom Hayden, Jane Fonda, and their ilk can be shown cheering.

To the near universal claim that Diem and Thieu corrupt and inept, Burns might wish to describe how the North Vietnamese communists have proven themselves far more totalitarian, corrupt, imperialist, and vindictive. That South Vietnamese troops were routinely cowardly is false. Running to the gunfire, South Vietnamese troops routinely took more casualties than Americans. They demonstrated extraordinary courage in defeating the Viet Cong in Tet 1968, Easter 1972 and in heroic, often suicidal, last stands in April 1975.

Among the mistakes made in Vietnam, Burns might tell how the coup and murder of the patriotic nationalist Diem might have been America's biggest mistake. Burn might acknowledge American achievements: winning the hearts and minds of peoples of Vietnam who ran away from their conquering "liberators;" and prevailing over the Soviet Union in the Cold War of which Vietnam played a crucial part.

The self-described American peace movement believed the communist propaganda that a communist victory would bring peace, national reconciliation and social justice. In fact, it brought blood baths, reeducation camps, new economic zones, property confiscations, and religious persecutions. The far greater number of victims—dead, wounded, traumatized, imprisoned and impoverished---of the war in Indochina came after the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon. Those escaping afterwards as "boat people" arrived without alleged stolen fortunes, but their children became America's valedictorians, doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and decorated military heroes.

The ultimate fatal legacy of Vietnam is that America has increasingly become a paper tiger feared and respected by neither friend nor foe. Burns just might reveal how Vietnam convinced Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden, Bashar al-Assad, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping that the USA was not a credible foe. The peace movement's history dominates today's academia, media, and entertainment industry. It is used to deconstruct the decent, free, and humane aspects of American political culture. If the Burns documentary advances the idea that Vietnam shows America is a uniquely evil, imperialist, colonial, racist power defeated by the progressive forces of the "peace" movement," then it is no better than the worst enemy propaganda in war.



Roger Canfield



Epilogue:

What we must do when the Documentary airs

**THIS ESSAY
IS NOT YET
COMPLETED**

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Addenda: Questions for Teachers and Journalists

In this monograph, we have provided answers to the questions we expect to be posed by the television series. You will hear contrary, nuanced, and sometimes counter-factual arguments on your TV set. Our views are regarded by orthodox academic historians as “revisionist.” That word is used to discredit us, but if you understand that it is targeted at any voice that does not adhere to the party line, you can understand its intent.

Though the views of Vietnam veterans are varied, and many have been suborned by fifty years of incessant propaganda from the left, the vast majority of Vietnam veterans appropriately takes pride in their service and would do it again. The number of actual “anti-war¹” veterans², as evidenced by the ranks of the so-called “Vietnam Veterans against the War (VVAW),” was always a minute, but vocal, fraction of the total. No one is against war more than the person who must fight, and possibly die, in it, but veterans from all wars have put their beliefs above their selves to do so.

There are many other questions to be asked about the Vietnam War in particular and we have provided references on the previous pages to answer them. If you have further questions, feel free to pose them at questions@vvhf.org but please provide a name and contact. We may also use those questions in future publications.

In parting, let us ask a few questions, that you may pass on to your teachers:

1) “If the United States is an evil, imperialist power, what major power does the accuser hold up as a model? Is it the Russia or China?”

2) “John Sifton of the well-respected human rights NGO, Human Rights Watch, recently said the following about Vietnam, ‘Vietnam is a non-democratic, one-party state with an abysmal human rights record.’ In their 2014 report, ‘Freedom in the World,’ the non-partisan Freedom House stated, ‘Vietnam is among the countries with the worst score for political rights and civil liberties.’ The Pew Research Center and the

¹ This term itself is a misnomer. The protesters were not against the war, just against their fighting on our side, or our allies winning the war.

² Some of the VVAW “veterans,” like Al Hubbard, were phony. And many other ostensibly veteran “story-tellers” turn out to be bearers of false witness.

Workers Rights Consortium have identified Vietnam as one of the worst countries in the world for the suppression of religion and for forced- and child-labor. Can you explain why communist Vietnam has such a poor record when it comes to human rights, especially since they came to power with the expressed purpose of enhancing human rights."

3) "If the communists only wanted "Peace" why did more people get killed in Indochina from 1975-1990 than those who died in the war from 1960-1975?"

4) "Many historians and other commentators have framed the Vietnam War as simply a nationalistic effort by Hanoi to reunify Vietnam and they ignore the regional and ideological dimensions of Hanoi's war effort. Many of Hanoi's documents specifically define the war as one that is theatre-wide, including the need for, and support of, communist insurgencies in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. If Hanoi's war was truly nationalistic, why did they see the need to have communist regimes in other SE Asian countries, countries that had nothing to do with the reunification of Vietnam, especially neutral countries like Laos and Cambodia?"

5) "If 'Free Speech' is a right worth defending, how does the left defend the fact that there were dozens of independent newspapers published in South Vietnam during the war and only three government organs allowed to publish in the North. How do those same leftists defend the lack of hiring and expression of alternate (read 'revisionist') voices on college campuses?"

6) "In 1965, there were seven ongoing communist insurgencies in SE Asian countries: South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. The only successful communist insurgencies were in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Now, 40 years after the last US soldier left South Vietnam and the only governments in control of the economies of Laos and Vietnam since 1975 have been communist, why are the economies of the four countries that remained non-communist far more successful economically than Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia? Is this not '*a priori*' proof that the communists have failed to effectively manage their economies to the detriment of their people?" (For economic statistics on all seven countries mentioned, refer to The Economist magazine's *Pocket World in Figures, 2105 Edition*)

7) “Isn't it time for the proponents of these false theories discussed in this monograph to admit they were wrong? Isn't it time for a factual history to be taught in America's high schools and colleges?”



***Joe De Santos, Jr.**
(*post-Vietnam)



Some comments from Burns' collaborator, Geoffrey Ward, may offer some insights into the finished product.

<http://chqdaily.com/2014/08/06/burns-ward-show-clips-from-2017-documentary-series-the-vietnam-war/>

“We got muddled about what we were trying to do,” Ward said. “We got attached to a regime that was not worthy of our being attached to it.”

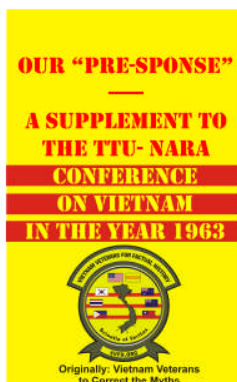
“We did not prosecute this war well, but no amount of money and weaponry was going to change that. We did abandon shamelessly our allies. It was corrupt. It was, and still is, hard to distinguish between the impulses of a brutal communist regime and the impulses of a legitimate nationalist movement.

. . . the still very tightly controlled communist regime in Hanoi.

We have been permitted to go to the often-neglected South Vietnamese cemeteries, where the North Vietnamese soldiers and the Vietcong soldiers are kept in meticulously kept cemeteries.

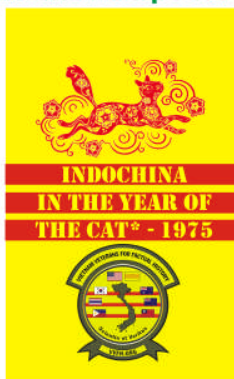
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