

TO: 45th Brigade Rifles (Family and Friends)
FR: Gary Heartsill
DA: June 2017
SU: The Vietnam War

Following are - more or less - some (random) comments about the Vietnam War, offering some questions, and suggesting some studies, so pertinent statements of ‘what really happened’ and ‘how do you feel about the outcome’ can be formulated. Because everyone has their own opinion – and reasons for it – let me offer some fodder as a starting point or kicking off place for a discussion. These comments will, at least for me, be able to justify my ‘opinion’ when one of my grandkids asks “tell them about the Vietnam War.”

Note: Perhaps we can sit around the evening fire in the pergola (perg’ a la) at a Bivouac and debate like a fighting bunch of riflemen? We should be able to answer the question...did we lose it or not?

Background

Ken Burns, as we all know, will be showing his master piece film in September and by all rights, meaning his penchant for putting on a good show, he should water our eyes with his report. For one, I am looking forward to his documentary – all 18 hours – but my task today is to get ready for his work and compare it with what is already being show and said by some Americans who where there. I want to ask some questions before his “never before told on film” puts us in front of our TV sets. The first questions have to do with his watering our eyes:

Will they be tears of joy or tears of defeat?

Where will he come down on how well we fought the war?

Did we win the bleeping war or not?

This is pretty serious. He could set the stage and show what really happened in history and make it so decisive it will be “the” history for the books and thus become “the’ word on the Vietnam War.” Or he could shade it, sparse it, and spin it – given some of the history we have seen on PBS – they do have their bloody line to hold.

How will we be able to tell the difference? That is, the difference between what we already know about the war and what his research and documentary will tell us?

Task of this email/memo:

Given the fact some of us have been there, some of us have friends who fought and died there, and some of the rest of us have watched the movies and read the books, the rest of us would like to know what really happened. Given the ambiguity of wars, our wars, the reporting of wars, we all know being able to definitively conclude what really happened may not be possible.

Given the ambiguity of wars perhaps some study should be accomplished so we can form our own opinion about the war? Of course, some of us already have an opinion and don’t need study, movies, books, or Ken Burns to ‘enlighten’ our opinions – like me: my mind is made up and I am unanimous with my position!

However, I have gathered some material that might be helpful in forming your opinion; for sure, it is just a start as you have your own material in your library. Please see the following references knowing full well there are hundreds that could be read or studied.

TV Documentaries

Watching old war movies these days caused a couple of TV movies, maybe war documentaries is a better term, two have come to, in my opinion, creditable history. The war began in 1954/1955 and ended in 1975 but my war time focus is from about the time we first put combat troops in country in 1965 until about the time the Peace Treaty was signed by President Nixon in 1973.

A. ***Inside the Vietnam War*** (Originally a three hour production shown in about an hour below. Of interest are the soldiers and their comments about the fighting.) This movie, there are more of course, will serve as the overall history of the war. We can see or should be able to see the bias and where ideas and spin come from when watching. Note my emphasis (bias) and direction in my short listing below.

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x10d0xb_inside-the-vietnam-war-ep-1_shortfilms

1963 – JFK killed

1964 – LBJ and Bay of Tonkin ‘incident’

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1965 – 2 Mar 65 to 2 Nov 65 *Rolling Thunder*, aerial bombardment of NVN

8 March 65 first combat troops arrive in Da Nang

14 Nov 65 Ia Drang, LTC Moore, the 7th at X-Ray

1967 – “Charlie Company” 4th of the 47th, 9th Division; last to be drafted and sent as a group to fight.

1967 – War protests

1968 – 30 Jan 1968 Tet Offensive

1969 – maximum number of troops in Vietnam of 500,000

1969 – 1973 Nixon Doctrine/Vietnamization

1972 – *Operation Linebacker II* was a massive bombing 19-29 Dec 1972 and helped cause the peace.

1973 – 15 Jan 1973, President Nixon signed the **Paris Peace Accords “Ending the War...”** but supporting the South Vietnamese “bullet for bullet, and tank for tank” for any future north aggression.

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1974 – President Nixon resigned and Ford took over 9 Aug 1974

1972 to 1975 – Exit the Americans, Democrats won in Congress and quit the war by un-funding what Nixon had promised in 1973.

1975 – Fall of Saigon 29 April 1975 “**We lost the war.**”

B. **National Geographic - *Brothers in War*** 1:27:57

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpQnmFESACQ>

This is the “Charlie Company” note above as their in country fighting was from Nov 1966 to Nov 1967. To me this is as close as we can get to being there with the live action and the personal stories of the guys who fought it. One of the ‘hippie’ looking survivors tells where he was ordered by someone to put a prisoner on a helicopter and (I think) take him back to be interrogated. The officer turned and left. While others watched the hippie pulled out his ‘45 and shot the *&^%\$ in the head and said “He ain’t riding in no helo with my troops going anywhere.” Pretty tough admission 50 years late...or was it?

Was impressed with the IV Corps area these guys fought in as I did not know of the big boats they operated off of to fight the war in the Delta south west of Saigon. There were 160 troops in Charlie Company, 26 were KIA, and 106 were wounded. Attention should be given to what these guys talked about on film, noting for instance they did their job but the thing that mattered most were their buddies and brothers.

Closing Comments

So, if my grandkids ask me about this war I do have some comments – and a few references. As briefly as I can right now here is my spin:

a. My hat is off to the guys who fought the war. I sat iron bomb alert in Korea for my tour in '68-'69 so those guys in the bush outside the wire have my total admiration for what they did. My 06 cousin Kenny Mike Moore leads this list. God bless them all.

b. Tip of the hat to my friends who flew in the war (my obvious most sensitive discipline). Know some who flew and flew in troop carriers like David Scovill who was killed. Lowell Thomas who sprayed Agent Orange in C-123s during 'Ranch Hand' and a number of my Webb students who flew and died in the war. But especially the guys who bombed North Vietnam flying the Thud and the F-4...especially Jamie MacLauchlin, III, (JAM) an Oklahoma A&M hero of mine, who bombed the hell out of Six Alpha, and Harry "Shooter" Eckes who flew top-cover in an F-4. "I would rather to have had a "100 mission patch over North Vietnam in a Thud" than have worn four stripes with any airline...but this is just me.

c. **WE WON THE WAR!** Nixon bombed the bastards and got it over...when I got home in '69 my friends all said Nixon was a crook but he wasn't to me. I'll tell you who the crooks were:

d. A big finger to: Lyndon Baines "gd" Johnson and Robert Strange McNamara for their absolute pitiful prosecution of the war.

e. A big finger to: the peace loving &^%\$ hippies of the 60's.

f. A big finger to: the drugs of the 60s and the CIA for supporting same.

g. A big finger to: the Democrats in 1972 who really were the ones who can say "WE LOST THE WAR!"

Finally

Listed below are some Google facts that may augment with your research. Help yourself.

I do not know who Bruce Herschensohn is but the article posted at the end of this paper is as close to being the history of the war as I see it.

I have not provided a reference list of books from this time in history but will upon request noting some are listed on my Web site. I will mention one that fits in with the ground operations I am rereading from a class I attended at NTSU (HIST 4336), who by the way the author, Philip Caputo, is featured in the first film. He says we lost the war too...

Now, what do you say?

Vietnam War

Google Search

19 June 2017

Who won the war in Vietnam?

The truth is that our military won the war, but our politicians lost it. The Communists in **North Vietnam** actually signed a peace treaty, effectively surrendering. But the U.S. Congress didn't hold up its end of the bargain. Jun 23, 2014

<https://www.prageru.com/courses/history/truth-about-vietnam-war>

(This paper is a good start, has had a lot of hits...but how truthful is it? – see two pages below)

What was the outcome of the war in Vietnam?

The North **Vietnamese** army - the NVA - massacred thousands of South **Vietnamese** after the Americans had left. Many people tried to flee South **Vietnam** (eg the "boat people"). The **Vietnamese** had to fight **wars** against Cambodia and China before their independence was secured.

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/history/mwh/vietnam/afterthewarrev1.shtml

What was the cause of the Vietnam War?

The **causes** of the **Vietnam War** revolve around the simple belief held by America that communism was threatening to expand all over south-east Asia. Neither the Soviet Union nor the United States could risk an all-out **war** against each other, such was the nuclear military might of both.

www.historylearningsite.co.uk/vietnam-war/the-causes-of-the-vietnam-war/

Why did the US get involved in the Vietnam War?

The USA wanted to prevent areas of the world falling under Communist influence. The Cold **War** was at its height in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the French appealed to the USA for aid. The US government saw **Vietnam** as another Korea.

Why did America lose the war in Vietnam?

America "lost" South **Vietnam** because it was an artificial construct created in the wake of the French **loss** of Indochina. ... However, the **American** public had grown tired of the **loss** of **American** lives and of the **war** itself, meaning that there's was no way that U.S. military involvement in the region could continue. Nov 16, 2014

https://www.prageru.com/sites/default/files/courses/transcripts/herschensohn-the_truth_about_the_vietnam_war-transcript.pdf

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE VIETNAM WAR PragerU.com

Bruce Herschensohn

Decades back, in late 1972, South Vietnam and the United States were winning the Vietnam War decisively by every conceivable measure. That's not just my view. That was the view of our enemy, the North Vietnamese government officials. Victory was apparent when President Nixon ordered the U.S. Air Force to bomb industrial and military targets in Hanoi, North Viet Nam's capital city, and in Haiphong, its major port city, and we would stop the bombing if the North Vietnamese would attend the Paris Peace Talks that they had left earlier. The North Vietnamese did go back to the Paris Peace talks, and we did stop the bombing as promised. On January the 23rd, 1973, President Nixon gave a speech to the nation on primetime television announcing that the Paris Peace Accords had been initialed by the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, the Viet Cong, and the Accords would be signed on the 27th. What the United States and South Vietnam received in those accords was victory. At the White House, it was called "VV Day," "Victory in Vietnam Day."

The U.S. backed up that victory with a simple pledge within the Paris Peace Accords saying: should the South require any military hardware to defend itself against any North Vietnam aggression we would provide replacement aid to the South on a piece-by-piece, one-to-one replacement, meaning a bullet for a bullet; a helicopter for a helicopter, for all things lost – replacement. The advance of communist tyranny had been halted by those accords.

Then it all came apart. And it happened this way: In August of the following year, 1974, President Nixon resigned his office as a result of what became known as "Watergate." Three months after his resignation came the November congressional elections and within them the Democrats won a landslide victory for the new Congress and many of the members used their new majority to de-fund the military aid the U.S. had promised, piece for piece, breaking the commitment that we made to the South Vietnamese in Paris to provide whatever military hardware the South Vietnamese needed in case of aggression from the North. Put simply and accurately, a majority of Democrats of the 94th Congress did not keep the word of the United States. On April the 10th of 1975, President Gerald Ford appealed directly to those members of the congress in an evening Joint Session, televised to the nation. In that speech he literally begged the Congress to keep the word of the United States. But as President Ford delivered his speech, many of the members of the Congress walked out of the chamber. Many of them had an investment in America's failure in Vietnam. They had participated in demonstrations against the war for many years. They wouldn't give the aid.

On April the 30th South Vietnam surrendered and Re-education Camps were constructed and the phenomenon of the Boat People began. If the South Vietnamese had received the arms that the United States promised them would the result have been different? It already had been different. The North Vietnamese leaders admitted that they were testing the new President, Gerald Ford, and they took one village after another, then cities, then provinces and our only response was to go back on our word. The U.S. did not re-supply the South Vietnamese as we had promised. It was then that the North Vietnamese knew they were on the road to South Vietnam's capital city, Saigon, that would soon be renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

Former Arkansas Senator William Fulbright, who had been the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee made a public statement about the surrender of South Vietnam. He said this, "I am no more distressed than I would be about Arkansas losing a football game to Texas." The U.S. knew that North Vietnam would violate the accords and so we planned for it. What we did not know was that our own Congress would violate the accords. And violate them, of all things, on behalf of the North Vietnamese. That's what happened.

I'm Bruce Herschensohn.

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