

**A COUNTRY
STAYS ALIVE
WHEN ITS
CULTURE IS
ALIVE.**

- SACEI Newsletter updates you on the latest news about Vietnamese-America.
- It serves as a LINK between SACEI members and those who are interested in the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American culture.

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Pride and Sorrow: Reflections on the Vietnam War

The Army and Navy Club
 Washington, DC * 28 October, 2014
LEWIS SORLEY

I begin by expressing my gratitude for the privilege of concluding the Army and Navy club's series of lectures, now extending over some three years, commemorating the service and sacrifice of those who served in the Vietnam War—and of their families.

I would like to start by telling you of another time, now some dozen years in the past, when I spoke about Vietnam. This took place at Culver Military Academy, a small school in Indiana, on Veterans Day. The young cadets were assembled out of doors at a place where this observance had been held annually for many years.

I titled my remarks "Also Great" and began by observing how, in recent years, much attention had been focused on our veterans of World War II, famously characterized by Tom Brokaw as "the greatest generation." More recently, I noted, America had sent nearly three million servicemen and women to a war in Vietnam.

There they served, I suggested, with valor and abilities fully equal to those of their World War II counterparts, but—primarily due to ideological contention swirling around the war and, inevitably, those who fought it—their sacrifices and achievements had never been adequately appreciated, much less acknowledged or acclaimed. Yet, I said, they were also great.

Then I explained why they deserved that accolade, including the fact that two thirds or more were volunteers, just the opposite of World War II in which two-thirds of those who served had been drafted. Afterward I was over on the guest house where I was staying when the doorbell rang. I answered. It was a maintenance man, there to make some minor repair. I let him in and he started down the basement, then turned back. "Say," he

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Pride & Sorrow... asked, “weren’t you the speaker this morning?” I admitted that I was.

“I was there,” he told me, “I’m a Vietnam veteran, and that’s the first time I’ve ever heard anybody speak up for us. I want to thank you for that.” And he came back up the stairs and shook my hand. I don’t have to tell you that that moment made the whole trip worthwhile.

Never wanting to miss a chance to quote the great Carl von Clausewitz, especially for an audience such as you, I recall this observation by him: “is there a field of human affairs where personal relations do not count, where the sparks they strike do not leap across all practical considerations?” he asked. Then, providing his own answer: ‘the personalities of statesmen and soldiers are such important factors that in war above all it is vital not to underrate them.’”

In Vietnam, the validity of Clausewitz’s conclusion was solidly confirmed. The allied fortunes in that war went up, or down, in near perfect harmony with the American field commanders of the times, almost without regards to other factors.

Harkins, Westmoreland, Abrams, Weyand—each displayed the essence of his character, intellect, and abilities, and in each instance the war went accordingly.

General Paul Harkins was in Vietnam as commander of U.S. forces during the years 1962-1964. Harkins’ tenure was characterized by unrelieved optimism on his part. In October 1963, for example, he said this: “Victory...is just months away, and the reduction of American advisors can begin anytime now...I can safely say the end of the war is in sight.” It did not work out quite that way.

Then came General William C. Westmoreland, who commanded U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, for the four years 1964-1968. In 1966 general Westmoreland said he could end the war by the summer of 1967. That was wrong. He later denied he had made such a prediction. That was false.

General Westmoreland’s tenure was marked by his constant requests for more and more troops, leading to a deployed force that at the high water mark amounted to 543,400 troops.

Westmoreland was intent on conducting a war of attrition, which meant quite simply that the objective was to kill as many of the enemy as possible. The premise was that this would cause the communist enemy to lose heart and cease aggression against the South Vietnamese. The measure of merit in such a war was body count.

Fixated on these operations, Westmoreland largely ignored upgrading South Vietnam’s military forces, leaving them equipped with cast-off U.S. weapons of World War II vintage while American forces got the new M-16 rifle. Thus the South Vietnamese were during these years forced to fight outgunned by the communists, who were provided the great AK-47 assault rifle by their patrons.

Westmoreland likewise ignored the crucial task of pacification, especially rooting out the covert Viet Cong infrastructure that was using terror and coercion to maintain dominance in South Vietnam’s rural hamlets and villages.

Observed Lieutenant General Phillip Davidson, Westmoreland’s J-2 (chief intelligence officer), “Westmoreland’s interest always lay in the big-unit war. Pacification bored him.” And, Davidson understood, that was a crucial shortcoming. “Search and destroy operations,” he said, “accomplished little in providing the secure environment which pacification required.”

Unfortunately the crucial aspects of the war lay in the villages, not the deep jungles, just the opposite of Westmoreland’s concept.

This was apparent to many, *many*, during his four years in command. Alexander Haig characterized Westmoreland’s approach as a “demented and bloody form of hide and seek.” Robert McNamara said, at a White house meeting, that ‘the war cannot be won by killing North Vietnamese. It can only be won by protecting the South Vietnamese.’”

But the numerous critics were unable to make their contrary views prevail, even though by May of 1967 even President Lyndon Johnson recognized that the war was at what he called “a bloody impasse.” Westmoreland was nevertheless left in command for nearly another year.

General Westmoreland was, it must be conceded, successful in his own terms, killing a huge number of the enemy, but that accomplished nothing. Instead they simply poured in more and more replacements.

Westmoreland was on a treadmill. Senator “Fritz” Hollings from his home state of South Carolina tried to explain this during a visit to

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Vietnam. Westmoreland had bragged to him that U.S. forces were killing the enemy at a ratio of ten to one.

"Westy," replied Senator Hollings, "the American people don't care about the ten. They care about the one." Westmoreland never grasped the significance of that simple observation.

Shortly after the watershed Tet offensive of early 1968 a new leadership team took charge of the American presence in Vietnam. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker was joined by General Creighton Abrams in command of U.S. military forces and, not long thereafter, Ambassador William Colby became head of American support of pacification.

Said General Fred Weyand: "The tactics changed within fifteen minutes of Abrams' taking command."

In due course Abrams changed what he could—everything he could. He inherited an awkward chain of command, lack of unified operational control over South Vietnamese and other allied forces, an elaborate and wasteful base camp system, an exposed string of static border camps, severe geographical and procedural restrictions on conduct of the war, greatly diminished public support. These, he had to live with. The rest he changed.

No longer was body count the measure of merit. Instead, it was population secured that governed. Search and destroy operations were replaced by clear and hold, and increasingly the "hold" was provided by the South Vietnamese territorial forces.

And, insisted Abrams, there must now only be "One War" in which improvement of South Vietnamese forces, and support for pacification, were of equal importance and received equal emphasis with combat operations.

In February 1969 an Army liaison team visited Vietnam. Later wrote one of its members, an experienced infantry officer who had served two previous tours in Vietnam as a battalion commander and an advisor, "It is a new and different war!" The key changes he cited were that "US Army units are fragmenting, with small unit operations replacing searches by battalions and brigades; and second, we are now working with the Vietnamese to an unprecedented degree, targeting on the enemy among the population rather than forces hiding in the jungles."

That officer said he might have been skeptical had he been told of these changes in headquarters briefings, but he had gotten his information from the troop level. "I put my faith," he said, "in the off-the-cuff comments of C-ration consumers, and those men are unanimous in their opinion that a new situation exists and that our response is effective."

Positive results of this new approach were soon widely apparent. Meanwhile US forces were being unilaterally withdrawn in successive increments, so more and more it was the South Vietnamese who were achieving these results.

In accordance with terms of the Paris Accords, signed in late January 1973 and theoretically ending the war, the last American forces were withdrawn from Vietnam. Meanwhile the invading forces of North Vietnam, not mentioned in the Accords, were allowed to remain in the South. The war continued unabated.

If the South Vietnamese had shunned the Paris Agreement, it was certain not only that the United States would have settled without them, but also that the U.S. Congress would then have moved swiftly to cut off further aid to South Vietnam.

If, on the other hand, the South Vietnamese went along with the agreement, hoping thereby to continue receiving American aid, they would be forced to accept an outcome in which North Vietnamese troops remained menacingly within their borders. With mortal foreboding, the South Vietnamese chose the latter course, only to find—dismayingly—that they soon had the worst of both, NVA forces ensconced in the south and American support cut off.

President Nixon had assured South Vietnamese Nguyen Van Thieu of three things:

- First, if North Vietnam violated terms of the agreement and resume aggression against the South, the United States would intervene militarily to punish such actions.
- Second, if renewed fighting erupted the United States would replace on a one-for-one basis major combat systems lost by the South Vietnamese (items such as tanks and artillery pieces) as was provided for in the Paris Accords.
- And third, the United States would continue to provide South Vietnam robust economic assistance.

In the crunch, the United States defaulted on all three of these commitments, thereby sealing South Vietnam's fate.

Soon after the Paris Accords were signed the United States Congress set about undermining South Vietnam's ability to continue defending

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itself. It prohibited "combat activities by United States military forces in or over or from off the shores of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, or Cambodia," with a cutoff date of 15 August 1973.

Then military assistance to Vietnam was cut by a third from FY 1973 (\$2.1 billion) to FY 1974 (\$1.4 billion) and by half again for FY 1975 (\$700 million).

So determined was a malevolent Congress to devastate our unfortunate one-time ally that for FY1975 it even enacted legislative prohibitions on the purchase of *fertilizer* for South Vietnam.

Wrote one observer of these events, in just six months "the Congress had destroyed the foundation of the Paris Agreements" and "struck a devastating blow at... the South Vietnamese government."

Neither side in the conflict had an independent capacity to wage war. The North Vietnamese were dependent on the Soviet Union and China, just as the South Vietnamese were dependent on the United States. North and South Vietnam could to a large extent provide their own foodstuffs and of course their own manpower. Beyond that, though, they were almost totally reliant on their patrons for every sort of implement of war and logistical means, from weapons and vehicles to ammunitions, medical supplies, communications, and fuel.

While the U.S. Congress was systematically cutting aid to the South Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese were receiving dramatically increased support from their patrons. A latter history of the people's Army of Vietnam, published in Hanoi, boasted of North Vietnam's success in building up forces in the South once the Paris Accords were signed. "From January until September 1973," it stated, "the amount of supplies sent from North Vietnam into the South rose to 140,000 tons, four times as much as in 1972."

That was not the half of it. "the quantity of supplies transported along the strategic transportation corridor [referring to the ho Chi Minh Trail] from the beginning of 1974 until the end of April 1975," read the PAVN history, "was 823,146 tons, 1.6 times as much as the total transported during the entire previous thirteen years."

My friend Tom Polgar, the last CIA Chief of Station, Saigon, described the results in his final cable: "Ultimate outcome hardly in doubt, because South Vietnam cannot survive without U.S. military aid as long as North Vietnam's war making capacity is unimpaired and supported by Soviet Union and China."

Americans would not have liked hearing it said that two totalitarian states—the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China—had proved more faithful and more reliable as allies than the American democracy, but that was indeed the fact.

As the end came in Vietnam secretary of defense James Schlesinger, a man of decency and compassion, dispatched a message to all members of the American armed forces. "For many of you," he acknowledged, "the tragedy of Southeast Asia is more than a distant and abstract event. You have fought there; you have lost your comrades there; you have suffered there."

Schlesinger reminded those who fought the war that they had left the field with honor, stating also his conviction that America's involvement had not been without purpose. "I salute you for it," he told the forces worldwide. "Beyond question you are entitled to the nation's respect, admiration, and gratitude."

General Abrams died while he was Army Chief of Staff, the only officer so serving ever to die in office. His death occurred in the autumn of 1974, sparing him the agony of watching the full impact of our abandonment of South Vietnam and its then-inevitable defeat.

Later a memorial to him was put up at Carlisle Barracks. Just a chunk of rock, really, it was placed so that every War College student would pass it every day. On it were these words of Abrams' own:

"There must be, within our Army, a sense of purpose and a dedication to march a little farther, to carry a heavier load, to step out into the darkness and the unknown for the safety and well-being of others."

That is exactly what our Vietnam veterans, supported heroically by their families, did for us and for our nation.

It seems fitting to me, and very important, that in this concluding lecture in our Vietnam commemorative series we also

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acknowledge the heroic struggles of the Vietnamese themselves to retain their freedom and independence and, after we abandoned them and that effort necessarily failed, the magnificent way in which millions of expatriate Vietnamese have built new lives for themselves and their families in America, Australia, Canada, France, and other countries around the world.

Pride & Sorrow...

A quarter century after the conclusion of the Vietnam War a plaque was dedicated honoring Vietnamese who had during the war graduated from the Armor School. Five former South Vietnamese officers were there, including Colonel Ha Mai Viet, my very dear friend since we had been captains in the Armor Officers Advance Course at Knox in 1961-1962.

"Americans," I said, "most of them, served a one-year tour in Vietnam. These Vietnamese officers served one tour—for the duration."

"Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Huu An commanded a cavalry troop for four years, then a cavalry squadron for four more years. Colonel Tran Ngoc Truc did the same thing, then commanded an armor brigade. Lieutenant General Vinh Loc commanded a division, then a corps, for two years each, then headed the national Defense College for six years. Lieutenant colonel Hang Phong Cao commanded a cavalry troop, was XO of a cavalry squadron, and then was a district chief. Colonel Ha Mai Viet was Director of instruction of the Armor school, commanded a cavalry troop and a cavalry squadron, was G-3 of the Armor Command, province chief of Quang Tri province, and G-3 of I Corps."

"In America," I continued, "these men and their families, and others like them, nearly a million people altogether, have greatly enriched our society and culture by their hard work and good citizenship."

"In short," I said, "we have every reason to be proud of our South Vietnamese colleagues, both their conduct through the long and difficult years of warfare and in how they have dealt with the tragedy of the eventual outcome."

The plaque reads like this:

IN HONOR AND MEMORY OF THE

**712 ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF
VIETNAM STUDENTS**

**WHO ATTENDED THE ARMOR SCHOOL DURING
THE VIETNAM WAR**

WITH ADMIRATION AND RESPECT

I had written the language of the plaque to conclude with the words "admiration and regret." In the year 2000 that was still a bit too much for the powers that be, so the last words was changed from "regret" to 'respect.' These days I suspect that "regret" would be readily approved.

Nearly a quarter-century after the war Nick Sebastian, a West Point graduate then with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, spent three months in what had once been Saigon interviewing candidates for political asylum in the United States, former "boat people" who had been forcibly returned from refugee camps elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

It was for Sebastian a moving and humbling experience, for he found both the country of Vietnam and its people beautiful, persevering with admirable spirit under a repressive regime and terrible economic hardship. "The people I met throughout the country," he reported, "accept their loss and in many cases unbelievable subsequent persecution with an equanimity, fortitude, strength of character, and will to survive that is awe-inspiring."

In concluding my book *A Better War* I wrote this:

"Long after the war was over, after the fighting had ended, after Bunker was dead, and Abrams too, after the boat people and all the other

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sad detritus of a lost cause, the eldest of general Abrams's three sons, all Army officers, was on the faculty of the Command & General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. There someone reminded him of what Robert Shaplen had once said that his father deserved a better war.

"He didn't see it that way," young Creighton responded at once. "He thought the Vietnamese were worth it."

All of you know about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall here in Washington, referred to by many as just "The Wall." Probably most of you have been there, some I am sure many times. In concluding these remarks I would just like to say a few words about that place.

Initially I did not like the Wall. It seemed to me simply a black ditch remembering only the dead, and portraying them not as heroes but as victims. But soon my West Point classmates began a custom of visiting the Wall every year near Veterans Day, placing each time a wreath by the name of one of our ten classmates and one former classmate who lost their lives in Vietnam. Still I did not attend.

But then came the time when the one to be honored was my cadet roommate, and I simply could stay away. Now Ginny and I are there every year, standing with our surviving classmates, and many children and grandchildren, to remember and honor the service of those who gave their lives in service to our country.

In November 2007 I was privileged to take part in a ceremony called the "reading of the Names" at the Wall. In observance of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the memorial's dedication, volunteers took turns reading aloud all 58,000+ names inscribed on it. That took some sixty-five hours over the course of four days.

I volunteered to read in the first segment, beginning at 5AM, of Friday 8 November. Each reader was assigned thirty names, with the list provided in advance, and allotted two minutes to get through them all. I studied my list, deciding how some of the names should be pronounced, then practiced the entire list several times. I took special care with the name of George Micha Smyrychynski—twelve letters and only one vowel.

I found the whole experience to be very touching, and was particularly impressed by those who had volunteered as readers (especially at five o'clock on a very dark and fairly cold morning). Not all were veterans, as I might have anticipated. Many were young people. All seemed energized and moved by being part of this.

We had been instructed not to ad lib anything, just read the names, but when another man, obviously a veteran, said softly, after finishing his list, "Thank you, my brothers," no one seemed to mind.

So I would like to close with this, remembering 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 the other nations who joined in that effort, and—perhaps especially—all their families:

Thank you, my brothers and sisters.

And just one thing more. I will take some questions and comments if you wish, but other than that my talk this evening is going to constitute my final assessment of the Vietnam War.

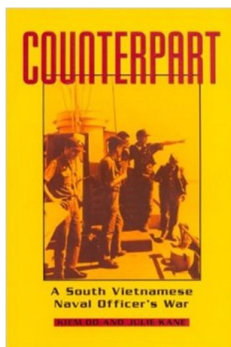
My concluding words are these: It didn't have to end that way.

About the Author

Lewis Sorley is a third-generation graduate of the United States military Academy who holds a Ph.D. degree from the Johns Hopkins University. During his two decades of military service he led tank and armored cavalry units in the United States, Germany and Vietnam, served in staff assignments in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Office of the Army chief of Staff, and was on the faculties at West Point and the Army war College.

Counterpart: A South Vietnamese Naval Officer's War

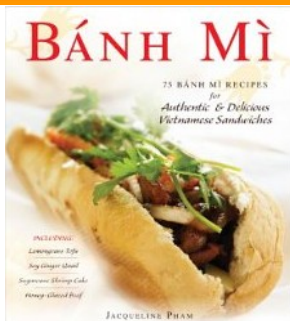
Amid the chaotic fall of Saigon in April 1975 Capt. Kiem Do, deputy chief of staff for operations in the South Vietnamese Navy, secretly planned and quietly carried out the evacuation of thirty-five ships and some thirty thousand at-risk South Vietnamese. That disciplined retreat is only one of many little-known events of the war recalled in this revealing memoir, the first to be published in English by an officer of the South Vietnamese Navy. Also included are first-person accounts of skirmishes against the Binh Xuyen pirates, life with Diem and Madame Nhu...



<http://www.amazon.com/Counterpart-South-Vietnamese-Naval-Officers/dp/B007PM7SBK/>

Banh Mi. 75 Banh Mi Recipes: Jacqueline Pham

The quintessential Vietnamese street food--in your own home! Indulge in the intoxicating aroma and exotic taste of a freshly baked baguette topped with savory pork, bright cilantro, and thin strips of pickled carrots and daikon. With Banh Mi, you can enjoy these flavorful Vietnamese sandwiches without ever having to step out of your home. From vegetarian options to meat-filled sandwiches, this book will provide you with step-by-step instructions for creating 75 delicious banh mi recipes, including: Spicy eggplant tofu, Vietnamese-style chicken curry, Char siu barbecue pork, Mango grilled shrimp, Complete with recipes for classic Vietnamese pickled condiments, flavorful sauces, fresh baked breads, and classic sides.



<http://www.amazon.com/Banh-Vietnamese-Sandwiches-Lemongrass-Honey-Glazed/dp/1440550778/>

Hoang Kim Cung: Miss Nebraska USA 2015



<http://www.nbcneb.com/home/headlines/NBC-Nebraskas-Kim-Cung-Wins-Miss-Nebraska-USA-2015-283659391.html>

Kim Cung is a born and raised Texan and ecstatic to learn all about Nebraska. A proud Texas Longhorn, she graduated from the University of Texas at Austin and majored in broadcast journalism. While at UT, she reported and anchored for Texas Newswatch and hosted Good Morning TX. Kim spent a full summer in New York City when she received a CBS News Fellowship, working for Sunday Morning and also interned at KEYE, the CBS affiliate in Austin.



Vietnam: Pervasive Deaths and Injuries in Police Custody

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/15/vietnam-pervasive-deaths-injuries-police-custody>

Officers who commit serious, even lethal, transgressions rarely face serious consequences. In many cases in which abuses are officially acknowledged police officers face only light internal disciplinary procedures, such as criticisms or warnings. Demotions, transfers, or dismissals of offending officers are rare, and prosecutions and convictions even rarer. Even when they are prosecuted and convicted, police officers tend to receive light or suspended sentences.

In one case, a police officer was even promoted after committing abuses. In July 2010, [deputy chief Nguyen Huu Khoa of La Phu commune \(Hoai Duc district, Hanoi\)](#) was accused of beating a truck driver named Nguyen Phu Son. It was unclear how the case was investigated and handled, but by December 2010, Nguyen Huu Khoa had been promoted to chief.

“Vietnam should promptly open an impartial investigation for every accusation of police brutality, and take strong action when the evidence reveals abuse,” Robertson said. “Until police get a loud and clear message from the top levels of government that abuse won’t be tolerated, there will be no security for ordinary people who fall into police hands,”

In several of the cases, Human Rights Watch found that police arrested people based on vague suspicions without supporting evidence, and then beat them to elicit confessions. Police also routinely ignored basic procedures to safeguard citizens against ill-treatment or arbitrary detention and prevented lawyers and legal consultants from gaining immediate access to their clients.

“All persons detained should be granted immediate and unhindered access to their lawyer in order to minimize possible police abuse during interrogation,” said Robertson.

The Vietnam government should immediately adopt a zero-tolerance policy for abuse by police, provide better training for police at all levels, particularly commune police, and install cameras in interrogation and detention facilities. The government also should facilitate the role of legal counsel for suspects and detainees and ensure freedom of expression for journalists and in the internet.

The government should also form an independent police complaints commission to review and investigate all reported police abuse and misconduct and provide high-level support for prompt and impartial investigations and prosecutions of police abuse and misconduct.

Journalist Beaten by Policemen in Vietnam

The battered face of Truong Minh Duc a few days after he was attacked near Ho Chi Minh City, Nov. 2, 2014. Photo courtesy of Truong Minh Duc's wife

<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/media-11252014204726.html>

A freelance journalist in authoritarian Vietnam has narrowly escaped death after being beaten unconscious by eight policemen near Ho Chi Minh City, an international media watchdog and his wife said on Tuesday.

Truong Minh Duc was ambushed by the policemen in Thu Dau Mot, a town 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam and then beaten after trying unsuccessfully to flee into a nearby cafeteria, Paris-based Reporters Without Borders said in a report.



The Castle of Nguyen Tan Dung

Look at the castle Nguyen Tan Dung, Prime Minister of Vietnam since 2006, built for himself. Even Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu could not afford such a luxury.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5Gx2B9EEIs>

