

The Battle For Historical Truth

Remembering the Vietnam War

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The late Harry G. Summers Jr., Colonel of Infantry, and distinguished faculty member of the Army War College, often called people's attention to the fact that considerable differences in the treatment of the Vietnam War can be seen in the literature published in academia and that published by the veterans who fought it. He also pointed out that even among the combat veterans there are differences according to the time frame of their involvement and the role they played.

Michael Lind, author of *Vietnam: The Necessary War* (1999), though a self-described liberal, has also observed the ideological bias of academic writers, noting academia's still strong connection to the anti-war mythologies of the 1960s:

"For the most part, the academics, journalists, editors, and publishers who opposed the Vietnam War came from the core constituencies of the Democratic Party. As a result, the consensus story that the liberal left told about the Vietnam War and the Cold War in general combined themes from both the (secularized) northern Protestant progressive tradition and radical leftist mythology."

(The parenthetical insertion of "secularized" above is mine, but in other paragraphs of his book, Lind indicates his agreement with this assessment.)

The modern intellectual straightjacket of political correctness has tended to strengthen the pervasiveness of anti-war folklore in American academia and much of the media. Though it is largely disinformation—in fact, warmed over leftist propaganda—its continued proclamation by academia and the media has had a significant and unfortunate impact on conventional wisdom about the war. Consequently, although most of our military leadership learned the real lessons from the Vietnam War, many of our current political leaders and much of the public have absorbed misinformation and have apprehended wrong lessons about the war. There are dozens of dangerous misconceptions about the nature and conduct of the war that persist as part of a left-liberal worldview. These misconceptions must be corrected, not only for the sake of truth, but also for constructing intelligent national security policies. Basing national security and foreign policy on ideologically based myths could have a devastating cost to future generations of Americans.

My recent book (*Lessons from the Vietnam War*) lists twenty-three myths about the Vietnam War that are still widely accepted in academia, the media, and unfortunately by many of today's political leaders. Yet none of these myths have substantial factual or solid historical basis. So far as they misinform future national security and foreign policy decisions, they are dangerous.

In his December 1, 2009, speech at West Point, President Obama indicated that he and evidently his closest advisors and speechwriters hold fast to one of these myths. In a brief historical reference to the Vietnam War, he intoned that the communist insurgents in South Vietnam had substantial popular support among the people. In fact, except for a few areas, they had little real support in South Vietnam except what could be imposed by brutality, fear, and terrorism. They assassinated over 35,000 village leaders, schoolteachers, and other anti-communists to keep the

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people intimidated. Most of the Viet Cong were actually North Vietnamese and were part of an aggressive North Vietnamese plan to bring South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos under their control. Following their devastating loss of 45,000 men during their 1968 Tet offensive, they ceased to be an effective force.

Another related myth is that Vietnam was a civil war. In reality, it was a North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam with the first stage being an escalating guerilla war, just as was the Korean War. Every phase and major event of this invasion had to be approved in Moscow by Soviet leaders. It was a Moscow orchestrated and financed proxy war against the United States, with the Red Chinese eagerly assisting the Soviets in supplying war materials to North Vietnam. .

Still another related myth is that it was strictly a guerilla war. Again, guerilla war was only the first phase. Even the early Viet Cong units had five times the firepower of most South Vietnamese Army units. Fully equipped North Vietnamese divisions were invading South Vietnam by 1965. In 1972, they launched a veritable Panzer Blitzkrieg against the northern provinces of South Vietnam, equipped with 500 modern Soviet tanks and some of the largest Soviet artillery weapons ever deployed on a wide scale.

Another myth is that the war was unwinnable. I have documented in my book how we could have easily won in 1965 by the proper use of airpower, before the Johnson-McNamara policy of gradualism allowed the Soviets to build the most formidable anti-aircraft system in history for North Vietnam. We were beginning to win it in mid-1967, even with limited applications of airpower. We certainly could have won it by applying additional airpower following the devastating defeat and near massacre suffered by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units during their 1968 Tet offensive. However, this great Allied victory was turned into a political defeat by Washington politicians intimidated by leftist agitators. We, in fact, did win in 1972 by mining North Vietnamese ports and implementing devastating strategic bombing attacks against North Vietnamese military, transportation, and industrial targets. We forced North Vietnam to sign a peace accord that should have saved South Vietnam and Cambodia, but politicians in Washington threw the victory away.

In 1975, Congress refused to supply the South Vietnamese and Cambodians with the promised logistical support in the event of another North Vietnamese invasion. We simply stepped out of the way and allowed the North Vietnamese to overrun South Vietnam and Cambodia as the South Vietnamese and Cambodian armed forces ran out of ammunition and supplies. As a consequence, over three million South Vietnamese and Cambodian civilians were murdered, starved to death, or pushed into the South China Sea to drown.

One of the little recognized unfortunate results of persistent left-liberal mythology about the Vietnam War has been its impact on the widows and children of our Vietnam war dead.

In April 1967, while I was still recovering from being shot down and wounded on February 22 of that year, a new A-26 pilot, being assigned to the 606th Air Commando Squadron, went out of his way to come and visit me. I was first of all impressed that he had taken so much personal time to

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see me. We talked much about my recent combat experience and the progress of the war. We seemed to have much in common both in military thinking and in our overall worldview. We were both young Captains, but I was extremely impressed by his patriotism and devotion to duty and honor. One thing that I learned about him was that due to some previous experience, he was a dedicated anti-communist. He was also intelligent, level-headed, and brave. His name was Carlos Cruz. Over the years, my impression of him still lingers. He was one of the finest and most dedicated officers I ever met.

Just after Christmas that year, I heard that he was missing in action. He and his crew had spotted a convoy of ten trucks in southern Laos, near the South Vietnamese border, only about 25 miles from Khe Sanh. They had made three strafing and bombing runs on the trucks, and as they rolled in for a fourth run, the plane was hit by 37mm anti-aircraft fire and crashed and burned. The three bodies were not identified until October 1995.

I recently had an email conversation with his daughter, who told me how hard it had been growing up without a father and how doubly hard it was because of the anti-war myths that were frequently turned into anti-military myths. One college professor told her in front of a college class that her father had died for nothing.

In the few months since my book was published, I have found that a surprisingly high number of its purchasers have been the widows and children of our Vietnam war dead. I pray for their sakes and ours that historical truth will prevail against the cruel propoganda of the left, and I am proud to stand by their side.

Lessons from the Vietnam War: Truths the Media Never Told You can be purchased locally in Greenville, SC by calling The Times Examiner at (864) 268-0576.

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