

M16 Rifle New Weapon Gives Troops Rapid-Fire Advantage

VIETNAM



FAREWELL, GUNNY
R. Lee Ermey, iconic
Marine drill sergeant

Into the Quagmire

Fateful memo to JFK
led LBJ to war

South Vietnam is "not
an excessively difficult or
unpleasant place to operate."

—Gen. Maxwell Taylor,
Nov. 1, 1961

The Fighting Canadians

Northern neighbors
join U.S. forces


'That Terrible Day'

Bird Dog pilot aids
ambushed Marines

AUGUST 2018

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A collection of KMP bags is displayed against a dark wood background. At the top is a small, rounded rectangular bag with a leather strap and the 'KMP' monogram. Below it is a large duffel bag with a shoulder strap and a front pocket with the 'KMP' monogram. In the center is a messenger bag with a shoulder strap, a front pocket with a leather patch, and the 'KMP' monogram on the side. At the bottom is a laptop tote bag with a shoulder strap, multiple pockets, and the 'TDL' monogram. Lines connect the text descriptions to the corresponding bags.

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VIETNAM

AUGUST 2018

On the cover
U.S. troops in Vietnam
trudge through water
in an undated photo.
BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES;
INSET: AF ARCHIVE/ALAMY



OH, CANADIANS

When some Americans went to Canada
to avoid military service, thousands of
Canadians traveled south to join up.
By Bob Gordon



COURTESY: ROBB JARVIS, PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION: BRIAN WALLER

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By Francis Hamit



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DISCUSSION
AT VIETNAM
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HIT HARD

The North Vietnamese Army assaulted the Marine base at Con Thien for much of September 1967, an attack recounted in this issue's article on the rugged O-1 Bird Dog airp lane. To read more about the base, visit HistoryNet.com and search: "Con Thien."

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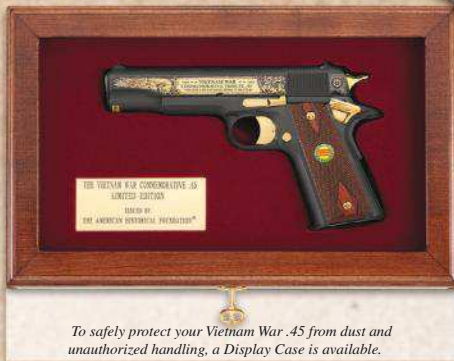
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ADDING TO KILL- RATIO DEBATE

As a veteran of air-to-air combat with the MiG-15s in Korea, a fighter gunnery instructor at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, and Williams Air Force Base, Arizona, combined with 120 F-105D Thunderchief missions in North Vietnam and Laos early in the Vietnam War, I feel William A. Sayers (in “The Great Kill-Ratio Debate,” June 2018) failed to recognize the significant differences between the airplanes and wars [in Korea and Vietnam].

First, while the F-86 Sabre [used in Korea] was designed for dogfighting, [in Vietnam] dogfighting in the gunless, but missile-equipped F-4C Phantom II was like trying to maneuver a 2-ton truck, combined with certain *very dangerous* aerodynamic characteristics. The Phantom’s aerodynamic flaws were verified in NASA wind-tunnel tests and corrected on later models.

The Red Baron study [examining the Air Force’s combat performance in Southeast Asia] stated that only 13 percent of the MiG kills in Vietnam involved any maneuvering, with 66 percent of our aerial victories accomplished with the U.S. pilot in a position of advantage, thanks primarily to radar vectoring. The rest were essentially thanks to Teaball or Combat Tree [technological advances that helped Air Force crews determine the location and identity of enemy planes].

At the end of Operation Rolling Thunder in 1968, our fighters were severely handicapped because the White House placed very severe restrictions on targeting, which essentially protected the enemy’s air defense network. This allowed the MiGs to begin their aerial engagements from a position of advantage 89 percent of the time.

In the Korean War, the North Korean and Chinese pilots were predominately teenage student



pilots. When Lt. Gen. Glenn O. Barcus assumed command of 5th Air Force in April 1952 he opened the door for us to ignore the Yalu River boundary with China and get them where they lived—in and around their airfields. That and the student status of the North Korean and Chinese pilots account for our very high kill ratio in Korea.

In the Vietnam War, the North Vietnamese air force pilots were trained in China and entered the fray with capabilities equal to ours. Based on the classified reports I remember, the MiGs [supersonic MiG-21s on ambush missions] came out of China at high speed and launched their missiles at the F-4s as they were recovering from bomb drops. Then they turned sharply and flew back into protected airspace in China, which nobody violated. And we did in fact use close formations with the F-4s in hostile territory—a significant command error.

So there is really no valid way to compare the kill ratio in the two wars.

John Lowery
Folsom, Calif.

Great article, but feel a few things were left out. One, F-100 Super Sabres were not allowed to do any air-to-air dogfights, just air-to-ground attacks, even with their four internal 20 mm cannons. The F-105D Thunderchief was a great fighter-bomber and

The F-4 Phantom's performance in Vietnam's air war is up for debate.



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managed to rack up 25 kills with its internal 20 mm gun or missiles. The F-4C and D Phantom IIs had no internal gun and depended on their missiles to bring down MiGs. The high rate of missile failure cut down on MiG kills. Gun pods were created but had very little effect on F-4 kills. When the F-4E came out, it had an internal gun and performed well. If the F-4 had come out with an internal gun at the beginning, the kill rates would have been much better.

Daniel Edwards
Retired technical sergeant
U.S. Air Force, Udorn air base
Thailand 1970-71
Custer, S.D.

The author of this article left out one important element which makes any comparison impossible. The fighter jocks of Korea did not have the tactical

genius of LBJ and McNamara to guide them as did the fighter jocks of Vietnam.

James A Brosman
Retired captain, U.S. Army
Vietnam 1965-69
Marysville, Calif.

William Sayers: I thank the readers for great comments! The F-100 was, in fact, our first air-to-air escort over North Vietnam. On April 3, 1965, Capt. Don Kilgus got the first U.S. kill of the war, when he bagged a MiG-17 Fresco with his 20 mm cannons while escorting F-105s over infamous Than Hoa bridge in North Vietnam. Kilgus was only awarded a "probable" because his gun camera failed, though his fellow pilots—and eventually the North Vietnamese air force—confirmed his victory. The Air Force, however, quickly replaced

the F-100 in the air-to-air role with the brand-new F-4C Phantom II.

Unreliable missiles were a major factor for both sides, and many Phantom pilots believed that an internal gun would have made a significant difference. But the Navy's gun-armed F-8 Crusader achieved only two gun kills over the course of the war. The gun-armed F-4E put the gun theory to the test in 1972, but its performance also appeared to belie the idea, accounting for only seven MiGs out of 22 F-4E kills and 50 for all Phantoms. Ironically, F-4Cs and Ds managed to shoot down nine MiGs during Operation Rolling Thunder with unwieldy external gun pods. It seems pretty clear that an internal gun would not have made the decisive difference that some predicted.

M14 Issues

The M14 ("Arsenal," by Carl Schuster, April 2018) did not use 10-round stripper clips to feed the magazines in the weapon. The rounds were actually in five-round strippers. The article indicated that the rifle utilized a long-stroke piston system. This is false. The rifle used a short-throw piston.

Also, it was stated that the M14 borrowed from the M1 rifle. The only similarity was bleeding gas off the barrel to operate the gas cycle of the weapon. The M14 used a piston, and the M1 utilized gas actuating the operating rod. The M1 did not have a piston.

The author indicated that the sights were a weakness of the weapon. This is incorrect. The sights were exactly copied from the M1, and never have I heard a complaint concerning either rifle's sights; both were tight and strong.



I make these observations of fact based on three commands that I occupied in the U.S. Army. I also used the M14 in sniper school.

James M. Hruska
Quincy, Fla.

Carl Schuster: I apologize for the errors. I got lost in my research on the prototypes that led to the M14. You are correct in noting the M1 and M14 share few common characteristics. The M14 resulted from the 1943-1953 effort to improve the M1, but that work evolved into a replacement after 1953. The stripper clips did contain five rounds instead of 10.

However, the article does not criticize the sight. The reference to the need for adjustment pertained to the early production models' inaccuracy due to poor quality control in manufacturing. Thousands of the early M14s had to be recalled and rebuilt to solve it. That process was completed by 1966, enabling the M14 to be selected as a sniper rifle in 1968 but too late to prevent the M16 replacing it. The M21 and later sniper rifles are based on the M14.

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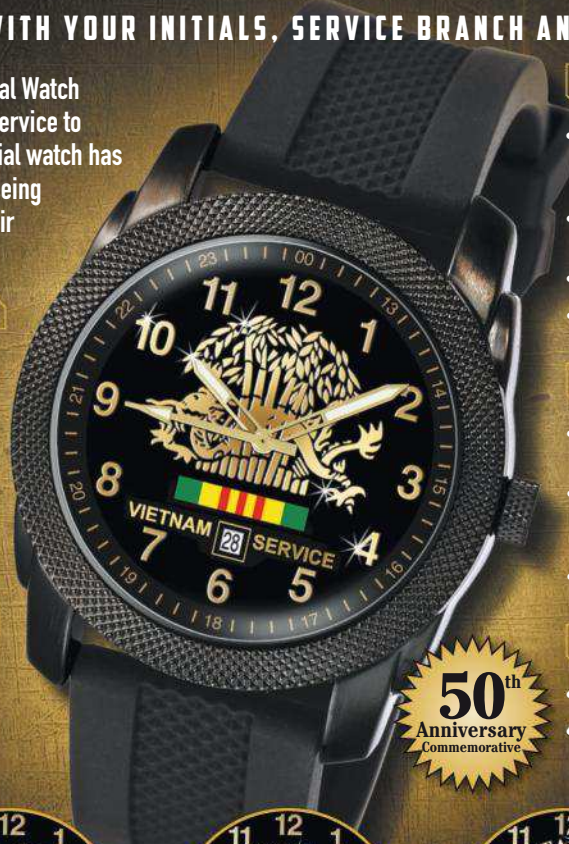
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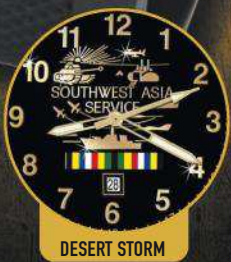
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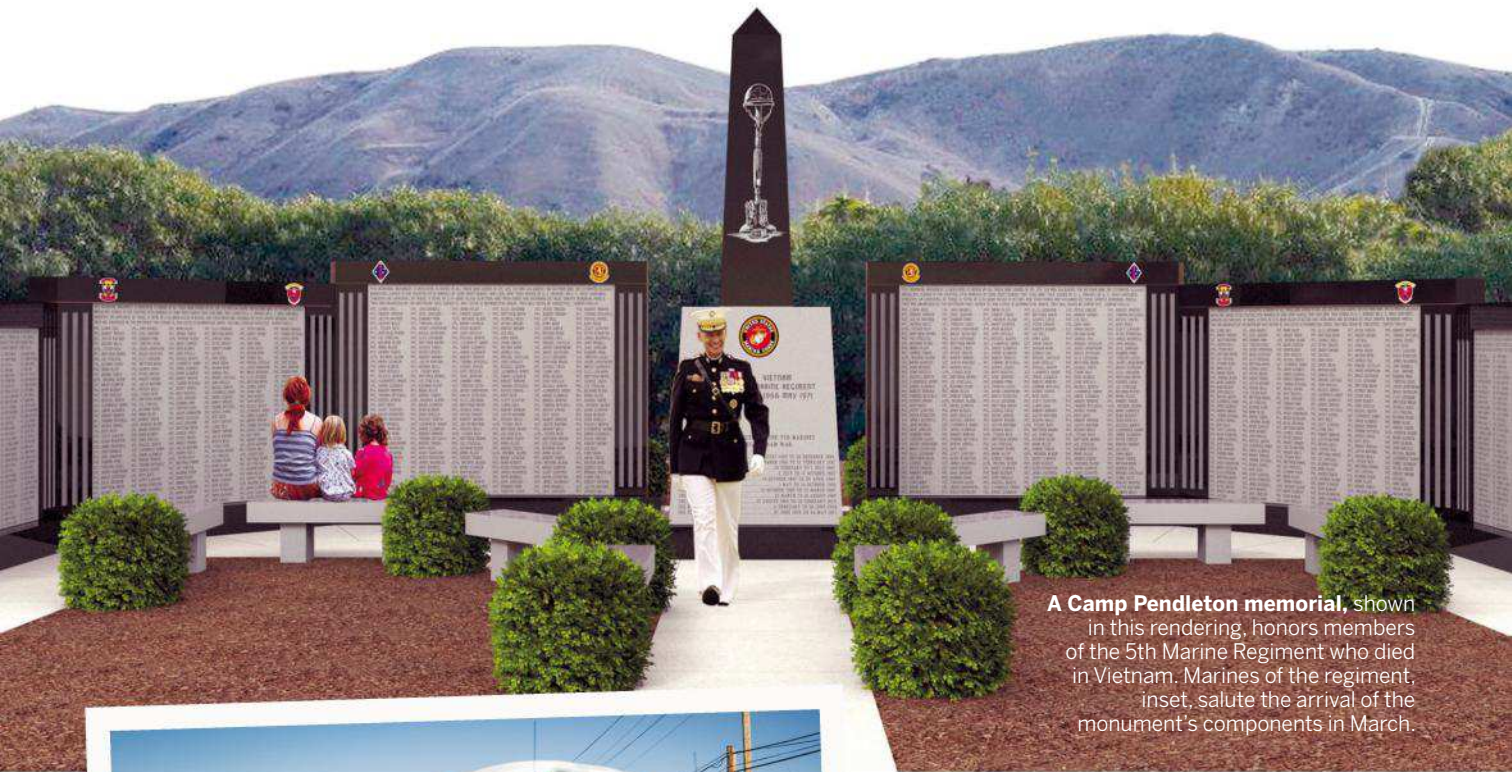
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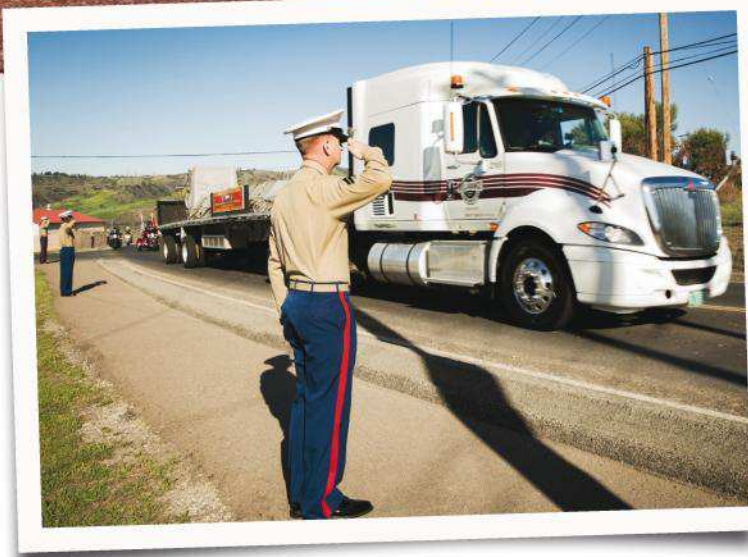
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A Camp Pendleton memorial, shown in this rendering, honors members of the 5th Marine Regiment who died in Vietnam. Marines of the regiment, inset, salute the arrival of the monument's components in March.



MARINES WELCOME NEW MEMORIAL AT CAMP PENDLETON

In March, a 50-ton granite memorial dedicated to Vietnam veterans of the decorated 5th Marine Regiment began its six-day cross-country trip from Vermont to Camp Pendleton, California. Three flatbed trucks transported the six stone panels—honoring the unit’s 2,706 Marines and sailors killed during the conflict—from Vermont’s Rock of Ages Foundry to Pendleton’s Camp San Mateo Memorial Garden, a journey that ended on March 29, National Vietnam Veterans Day.

Along the 3,000-mile route, the trio of trucks was accompanied by motorcycle riders of the Patriot Guard, a volunteer organization that forms honor guards at military funerals.

The 5th Marines, the most decorated regiment in the Corps, served in Vietnam between May 1966 and April 1971.

Steve Colwell, a 1st Battalion combat veteran who has been working on the project since 2014, hopes that the new memorial and the surrounding shaded garden will offer other veterans an opportunity to rest and reflect on their service. “It’s been a long journey,” he told *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. “No matter how much work it’s been, I have to remind myself that it’s an honor to be able to do this.”

TOP: 5THMARINES/VIETNAMMEMORIAL.ORG; BELOW: U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO/LANCE CPL. AUDREY M.G. RAMPTON

REMNANTS OF WAR STILL THREATEN THE VIETNAMESE

More than 40 years after the war's end, unexploded bombs and mines remain a danger to many people in Vietnam. Each year, more than 1,500 are killed and 2,200 are maimed from explosives left from the war years.

In an effort to devote more attention to the issue, the Vietnamese Ministry of National Defense announced on March 8 the creation of the Permanent Office of the National Steering Committee on Overcoming War Consequences of Unexploded Ordnance and Toxic Chemicals in Vietnam. The new organization will continue to work with groups such as the U.S. Agency for International Development on projects to clear areas of explosives.

"Although the war has been over, the severe consequences of landmines, UXOs [unexploded ordnance] and toxic chemicals still exist, affecting human health and living environments in many parts of the country," said Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

Between 1945 and 1975, more than 15 million tons of explosives were dropped on Vietnam. More than 800,000 tons of unexploded ordnance are scattered across the country, covering nearly one-fifth of Vietnam, reports *World & Vietnam Report*, the official press agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Hanoi estimates it could take as long as a century to finish the job, and the costs are likely to exceed \$10 billion.



An honor guard from the 4th Fighter Wing escorts a casket with the remains of Col. Edgar F. Davis to a cemetery in North Carolina.

Downed Airman Brought Home 50 Years Later

On Sept. 17, 1968, Air Force Lt. Col. Edgar F. Davis, of Goldsboro, North Carolina, was flying as a navigator in an RF-4C Phantom II on a night photo-reconnaissance mission over Laos when the plane was shot down by anti-aircraft fire. The pilot ejected and was rescued. Initially listed as missing in action, Davis was declared dead a decade later.

Investigators with the Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency unsuccessfully searched the crash site for his body six times between 2001 and 2015, when they finally got good news. A Laotian man told the Defense Department that his father had found the remains of an American airman near his home in 1968 and buried them. He gave bone fragments to the accounting agency, which used DNA tests to establish a match with Davis.

The colonel's remains were flown to North Carolina on April 5, reported *The News & Observer* of Raleigh. The homecoming included an Air Force honor guard and a 130-motorcycle escort to Goldsboro for burial at Eastern Carolina State Veterans Cemetery.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency currently lists 1,600 Americans as "unaccounted for" as a result of the Vietnam War.



An unearthed bomb, marked by a "danger" sign, at left, is close to Vietnamese homes. Below, controlled detonations of ordnance from the war prevent accidental explosions.



BELLOW: AP PHOTO/CHRIS BRUMMITT; INSET: STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; TOP RIGHT: U.S. AIR FORCE/STAFF SGT. BRITTAIN CROLLAY



U.S. ARMY TO REPLACE VIETNAM-ERA TRANSPORT

The Army is testing armored multipurpose vehicles to replace its aging fleet of M113 armored personnel carriers, above left, which were introduced in 1960 and first deployed to Vietnam in 1962, serving initially with the South Vietnamese army. The M113 is considered the most widely used armored vehicle of all time.

In April, BAE Systems delivered 29 infantry carriers, above right, under a \$383 million contract with the Army, according to United Press International. The delivery includes five variants for testing as command vehicles, mortar carriers, medical evacuation and medical treatment platforms and general-use vehicles. A more heavily armored sixth variant is planned for combat engineer units.

American and allied units extensively used the M113 for a variety of missions, both in combat and as a support vehicle behind the lines. The new vehicle would operate in concert with another armored troop-transport, the M2 Bradley, introduced in 1981, and alongside the M1 Abrams tank, in service since 1980.

Town Celebrates 50 Years With Adopted Unit

San Mateo, California, marked an unusual anniversary this past March. In 1968, resident Linda Patterson—whose brother was serving with A Company, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division—persuaded the city to “adopt” the unit.

Two weeks later Patterson’s brother was killed, but the city kept its commitment to A Company. Local students sent letters and care packages to the troops. When Patterson flew to Vietnam to visit the unit, she found that the soldiers deeply appreciated San Mateo’s support. They had kept the letters and photos sent by the California families, she said in an interview on the website of San Francisco TV station KGO.

San Mateo’s ties to the unit continued after the Vietnam War ended. The city sent care packages to A Company during its deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq. In recent years, eight nearby cities have adopted other units in the 101st Airborne.



A parade in San Mateo, California, on March 24 honored the 101st Airborne unit the town adopted during the Vietnam War.



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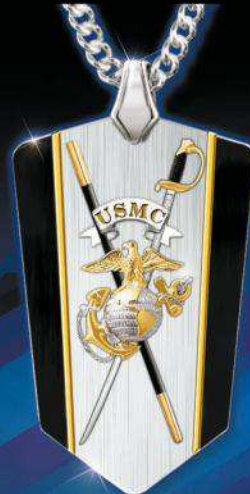
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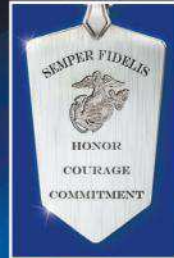
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Anna Chennault, an intermediary between Richard Nixon and the South Vietnamese government in controversial secret communications during the 1968 presidential campaign, died March 30, 2018, in Washington at age 94. Chennault (born Chan Sheng Mai in Beijing), was a war correspondent for a Chinese news agency during World War II and married Maj. Gen. Claire Chennault of Flying Tigers fame in 1947. After the communist takeover of mainland China in 1949, Chennault promoted the interests of the noncommunist government on Taiwan, became a major fundraiser for Republicans and backed Nixon. On Nov. 2, 1968, Chennault asked South Vietnamese officials in a phone call to boycott the Paris peace talks promoted by President Lyndon B. Johnson and await a more favorable deal from Nixon after the Nov. 5 election. They agreed to stay away, a blow to Johnson and Democratic candidate Humbert Humphrey. The call was recorded by an FBI wiretap. Johnson characterized Chennault's intervention as "political sabotage" and "treason," but decided not to make the Nixon-Chennault actions public.



R. Lee Ermey, a Marine drill instructor during the Vietnam War and actor best known for his Golden Globe-nominated performance in Stanley Kubrick's 1987 film *Full Metal Jacket*, died April 15, 2018, in Santa Monica, California. He was 74. After spending 11 years in the Marine Corps, Ermey was medically discharged and later had a decadeslong career as military adviser and actor in Hollywood films and as the host of the History Channel TV series *Mail Call* and *Lock n' Load*. In 2002, the commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. James L. Jones, gave Ermey an honorary post-service promotion to gunnery sergeant.



William Prochnau, a journalist who covered the Vietnam War and wrote a book about other correspondents covering the war, died March 28, 2018, in Washington, at age 80. In the mid-1960s, Prochnau went to Vietnam for *The Seattle Times* and wrote stories that contrasted with the optimistic assessments of U.S. military and government officials. He landed a spot on President Richard Nixon's 1971 list of political "enemies," publicly disclosed in 1973. Prochnau's postwar career included stints as a reporter for *The Washington Post* and a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*. He also wrote several books, including a novel. His 1995 book *Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles* looks at the experiences of war correspondents such as David Halberstam of *The New York Times*, Neil Sheehan of United Press International and Peter Arnett of The Associated Press.

Journalist Kate Webb Honored on Stamp



Australia has issued a commemorative stamp to honor Kate Webb, one of the few female journalists to report directly from the front lines in Vietnam. Webb, born in New Zealand but raised in Australia, started her career as a reporter at *The Sydney Daily Mirror*. In 1967, she traveled on her own to Vietnam and got a job covering the war for United Press International. After the war, she continued to report on international conflicts. Webb died in 2007 at age 64.

The stamp is one of five that recognize Australian women who have served in military and peacekeeping operations from World War I through today's conflicts. With Webb on the Vietnam stamp is Red Cross worker Rosemary Griggs.

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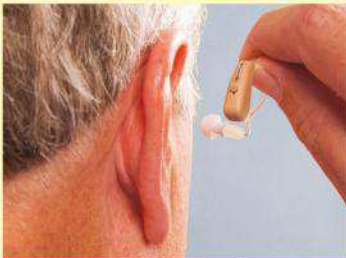
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JEFF MANDEL

The enemy knew me and others as intelligence officers.

All American troops in Vietnam were targets for the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong, but few faced the kind of threat that Jeff Mandel did. The Army lieutenant had a bounty placed on his head.

Mandel was an intelligence officer who gathered information from a variety of sources to pinpoint the location of enemy forces. But spies on the other side learned his identity, which made the young American a marked man.

After graduating from Rutgers University, Mandel enlisted in the Army in April 1966 and went to Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Once he received his commission, he was assigned to military intelligence and attended the Defense Language School in Monterey, California, to study Vietnamese dialects.

Mandel arrived at Tan Son Nhut air base, on the northern edge of Saigon, on Jan. 30, 1968—just as the communists were beginning their Tet Offensive throughout South Vietnam.

He served with the 219th Military Intelligence Detachment of II Field Force, the headquarters organization for U.S. units operating in Saigon and other southern areas of South Vietnam. The headquarters was at Bien Hoa, a major U.S. base about 20 miles northeast of Saigon.

In an interview with Vietnam magazine Research Director Jon Guttman, Mandel described the peculiar “seesaw” shadow war he waged with the enemy.

Born: April 1, 1944, Newark, New Jersey

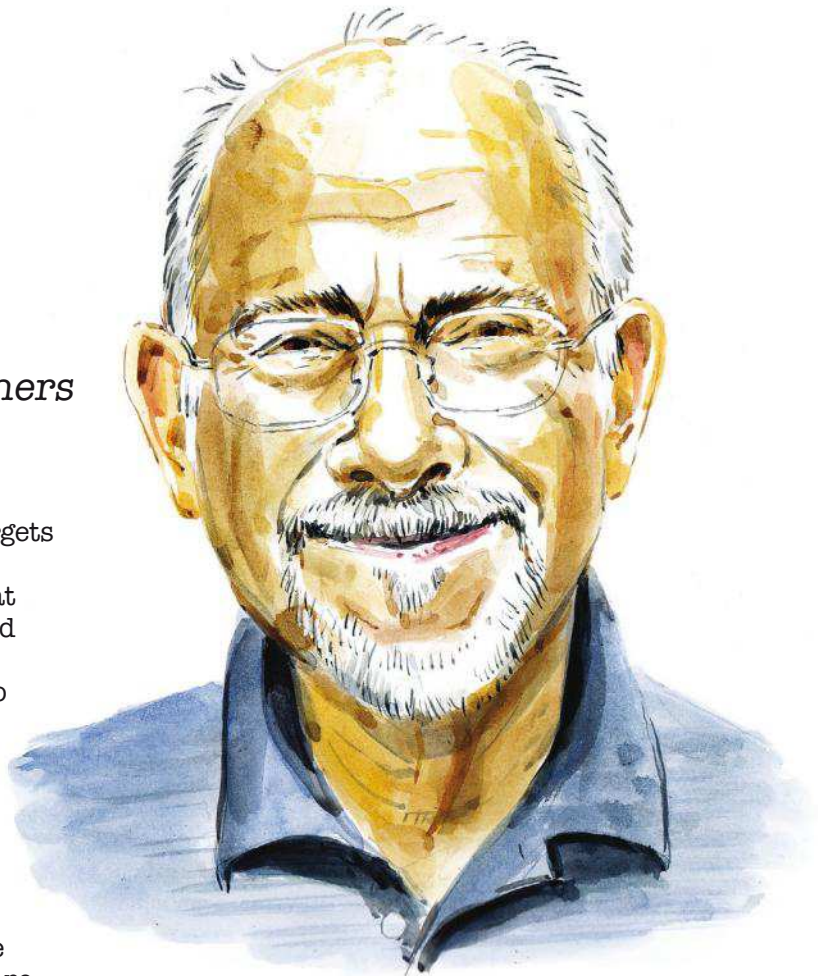
Residence: Ashburn, Virginia

Education: Rutgers University, bachelor’s degree, 1966; Rutgers Business School, MBA, 1971

Military service: U.S. Army, April 1966–April 1969; highest rank: first lieutenant

In Vietnam: January 1968–March 1969; 219th Military Intelligence Detachment

Professional career: Sales and management positions in technology businesses, 1971–2015



How did you get the intelligence-gathering assignment? I trained to be an infantry officer at Fort Benning. While there, I had the choice to go next to jump school or language school. Earlier in my life, I had studied German, two years in high school, Spanish, two years in college, and ancient Greek, three years in college. Someone identified me as language-capable. My TAC [training, advising and counseling] officer encouraged me to select language school. I studied North Vietnamese.

After language school, I went to Fort Holabird in Baltimore [for Army intelligence school].

You studied North Vietnamese, rather than just Vietnamese in general? Vietnam has its various dialects and there was a definite difference between North and South. It was extremely useful for listening in on North Vietnamese Army communications or interrogating POWs, but when speaking to anyone else, it seemed like a Bostonian being in Birmingham, Alabama. When I was in-country, there were 20 GIs working for me, all language-qualified, mostly in the South Vietnamese dialect.

What were your initial duties when you got to Vietnam just as the Tet Offensive was raging? After I checked in at Bien Hoa, I was assigned to Hurricane Forward, a temporary task force set up in Saigon to counter the Viet Cong offensive in Cholon [a section of the city that was

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home to many Vietnamese of Chinese descent]. I was in Saigon from the first week of February until the end of March.

What did you do after Hurricane Forward? I was assigned to IPW [interrogation of prisoners of war] at Bien Hoa. Later in the year I was assigned to the headquarters staff, in the G-2 [the military designation for intelligence staff] department, in G-2 Targeting [a unit that gathered information on the whereabouts of the Viet Cong's upper echelon so they could be targeted for U.S. attacks].

How did you obtain information on VC locations? The Order of Battle section [which kept records on the size and composition of enemy units] collected information on enemy movements in our area. The information came from a variety of sources, including prisoners of war, sightings by friendly Vietnamese, the Signal Corps [which intercepted enemy radio transmissions] and sniffer missions. We'd record the data on index cards, and several GIs would continuously analyze that information to find correlations that could provide the intelligence to authorize Air Force strikes.

What were sniffer missions? Developed by General Electric, sniffer was a chemical detection system based on the fact that the human body gives off ammonia that can be detected. Sniffer devices were made to be carried in an infantryman's backpack or by airborne means. We carried sniffer equipment on a UH-1 [Huey helicopter]. The devices looked like microphones and were attached to the helicopter's skids to detect ammonia content in the air at treetop level. A chemical officer managed it in the passenger section of the helicopter, where a G-2 Targeting member also rode. The sniffer system didn't work all that well, though. Once the VC learned of it, they would take a bucket of urine and hang it in trees, so we'd bomb where those buckets were, instead of where the enemy really was. Sniffer was effective, however, in disrupting supply routes and activities. The enemy constantly had to move around.

Did you operate primarily in the field or back at the base? I operated in the field. When I was at G-2 Targeting at the II Field Force base, I worked inside a concrete bunker. The smell of fresh cement permeated the area. The smell of the concrete drove me crazy. So to get away from it, I'd fly out several times a week on sniffer flights. Three helicopters assigned to II Field Force took off, one with the chemical officer, and two gunships in support. There would be ammonia readings and sound detection readings that required correlation. At 4 p.m. we'd brief the commanding general to authorize a B-52 strike. We'd relay the coordinates of enemy gatherings to [Andersen Air Force Base at] Guam, which would send B-52 flights, dispatched as early as dinner time. When we sent in the planes, it was my understanding that 500- to 1,000-pound bombs were used. After a B-52 attack, infantry



would go in and do a battle damage assessment.

Was there any target in particular that you sought? One thing we searched for was the headquarters of the NVA/VC's COSVN, or Central Office of South Vietnam, which was said to be in an 18-wheeler truck that moved daily and had a portable radio tower. During the rainy season, the LRRPs [long-range reconnaissance patrols] looked for tracks. We never did find it—the whole thing turned out to be a myth.

Did the enemy catch on to what you were doing? I am sure the enemy knew what we were doing. I think they knew me and others as intelligence officers in the 219th MID. We used day-workers in the unit to do washing, cleaning, etc. Washing our clothes, they saw our names and designations. They also observed where we went. In February 1969, we participated in Operation Bowie Winter, Col. George S. Patton's [son of the World War II general] armored operation near the Michelin rubber plantation [about 45 miles northwest of Saigon]. In one bunker, they found an index card with my name and a 200 piastre bounty on my head.

That must have left you a bit unnerved. I was unnerved. But in a way I was a bit chagrined that the price on my head [a small amount in U.S. dollars] was so low. What really scared me once was a captured picture of a sniffer helicopter taken by a VC or NVA photographer. It showed the two gunships and one helicopter with detection equipment. At that altitude, they could easily have shot it down.

Did you have any close calls? Once, when I flew a sniffer mission. Somebody [in the Viet Cong] had put a Claymore mine up in a tree. The VC identified the lead helicopter and manually detonated the mine. Fortunately for us, there was 1 inch of steel under that Huey. The pilot was excellent. He got control of the helicopter, pulled out before pancaking in the treetops and managed to bring us home. After seeing the ball bearing dents, I wondered why I ever left the safety of my office bunker. ▼

In-country
Jeff Mandel, here in June 1968, analyzed data to find high-level Viet Cong leaders.

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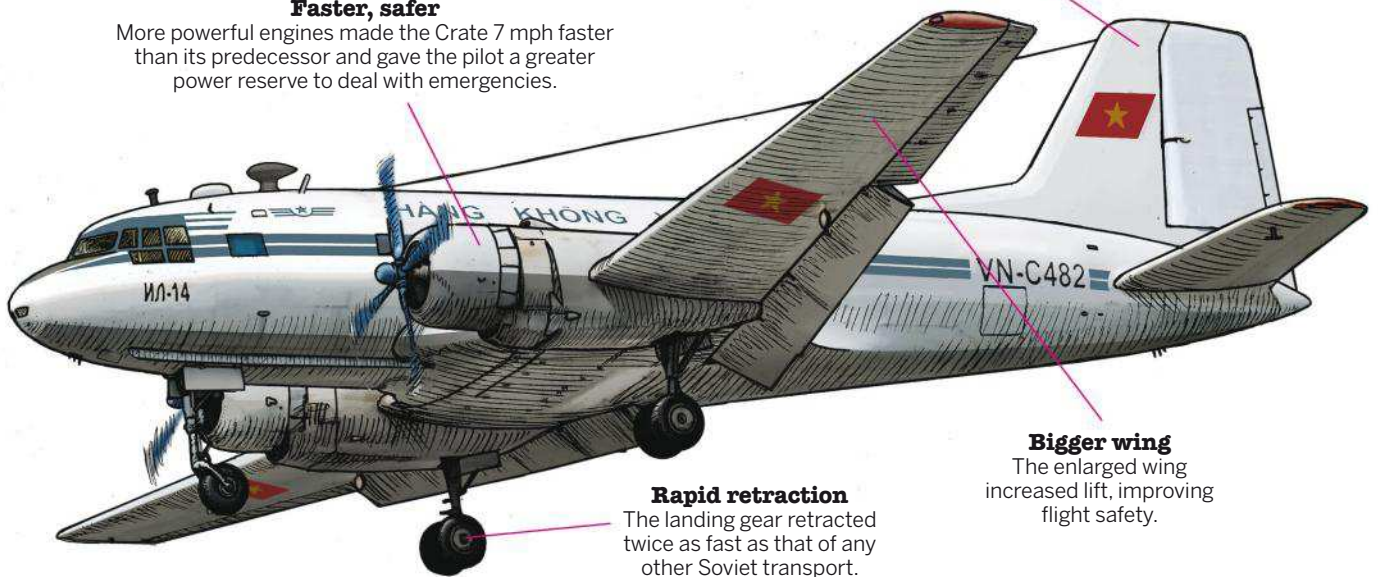
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NORTH VIETNAM'S ILYUSHIN IL-14 CRATE

By Carl O. Schuster

A twin-engine Ilyushin Il-14 (NATO code name Crate), North Vietnam's primary cargo and troop transport plane, flew over Tchepone Airfield in Laos on Oct. 25, 1961—a flight photographed by a U.S. Air Force McDonnell RF-101C Voodoo reconnaissance plane—and dropped supplies to North Vietnamese Army soldiers and Pathet Lao communist insurgents in Laos, just as Crates been doing since mid-to-late 1960.

The Il-14, essentially a modified version of the Soviet Il-12 Coach cargo plane, first flew on Oct. 1, 1950, and entered production in 1954. Moscow provided Hanoi with 45 Il-14s in 1958. The planes became part of North Vietnam's first operational air force unit, the 919th Air Transport Regiment, formed in January 1959. The NVA mainly used the Crate to deliver supplies to its soldiers and its communist allies in Laos and northern Cambodia.

Despite being outwardly similar to the Coach, the Crate was designed to correct some of the earlier transport's shortcomings. For example, the Crate's larger wing and broader tail fin made it more stable during single-engine flight. Those modifications, and the installation of more powerful engines, created a plane that was safer and slightly faster than its predecessor and also benefited from a larger carrying capacity.

The Crate was easy to fly and maintain, while also being robust enough to land on undeveloped airfields and withstand Southeast Asia's harsh operating environment. The aircraft's lack of instrumentation and modern navigation equipment would have limited it to a visual flight regime in most Western air forces, but North Vietnam's air force flew Crates in dangerous weather conditions. The resulting accident rate, particularly during the plane's early years, proved costly. Less than 20 remained in service by 1975, and only 12 were operational in 1979.

Serving alongside the Soviet-supplied Litvinov Li-2 cargo plane, the Il-14 gave the North Vietnamese a badly needed air transport capability and pilot training platform during the early years of the war. Postwar Vietnam retired its last Il-14 by 1998, ending 40 years of active service. ▼

Crew: 4

Engines: Two 1,900 shaft horsepower Shvetsov ASh-82T radial engines

Wingspan: 104 feet

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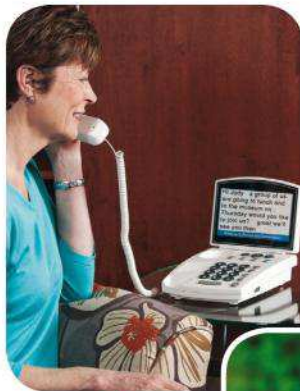
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July 5 The debut album of Creedence Clearwater Revival, a San Francisco area rock band whose songs often reflect the music of the American South, goes on sale. The self-titled album's "Susie Q" became a hit single.

July 28 The American Indian Movement is formed in Minneapolis when some 200 Native Americans meet to discuss police brutality, high unemployment, poor schools, racism and treaty violations. AIM's founders included Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt and George Mitchell.



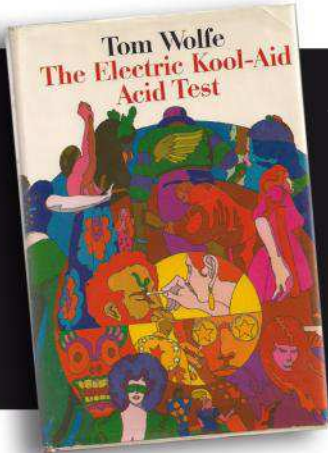
JULY=AUGUST 1968

July 20 The first Special Olympics, for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, is held at Chicago's Soldier Field with more than 1,000 athletes and over 200 events. The originator and chief advocate of the concept was Eunice Kennedy Shriver, sister of John F. Kennedy.



Aug. 7 *Six Days Seven Nights* begins its cinematic run. Moviegoers get to see the comedic adventures of widow Doris Day and widower Brian Keith as they deal with children opposed to their romantic relationship.

Aug. 8 In Miami Beach, former Vice President Richard Nixon accepts the Republican nomination for president. Earlier that day, he chose Maryland Gov. Spiro Agnew as his running mate. In Miami, three black men were killed by police called in after rioting sprang out of a civil rights rally.



Aug. 19 The *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* is published. Tom Wolfe's book about friends going cross-country in a psychedelic bus stocked with LSD became a classic of New Journalism, which emerged in the mid-1960s with deeply reported works written in the style of a novel.

Aug. 17 In a year filled with violence, The Rascals—a rock-soul band called The Young Rascals until early 1968—go to the top of the singles chart with “People Got to Be Free,” a plea to “love one another.” It stays No. 1 for five weeks.



Aug. 28 Anti-war protestors marching in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention come up against police who beat them back with billy clubs and tear gas as a TV audience watches. That evening Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Maine Sen. Edmund Muskie were chosen to run against Nixon and Agnew.



July 1 The CIA launches the secret Phoenix Program, conducted in coordination with the U.S. military and South Vietnamese officials to identify the Viet Cong's political leadership, who then would be “neutralized”—killed, captured or persuaded to defect. By the program's official termination in 1972, more than 80,000 VC operatives had been neutralized, at least one-quarter of whom were killed.

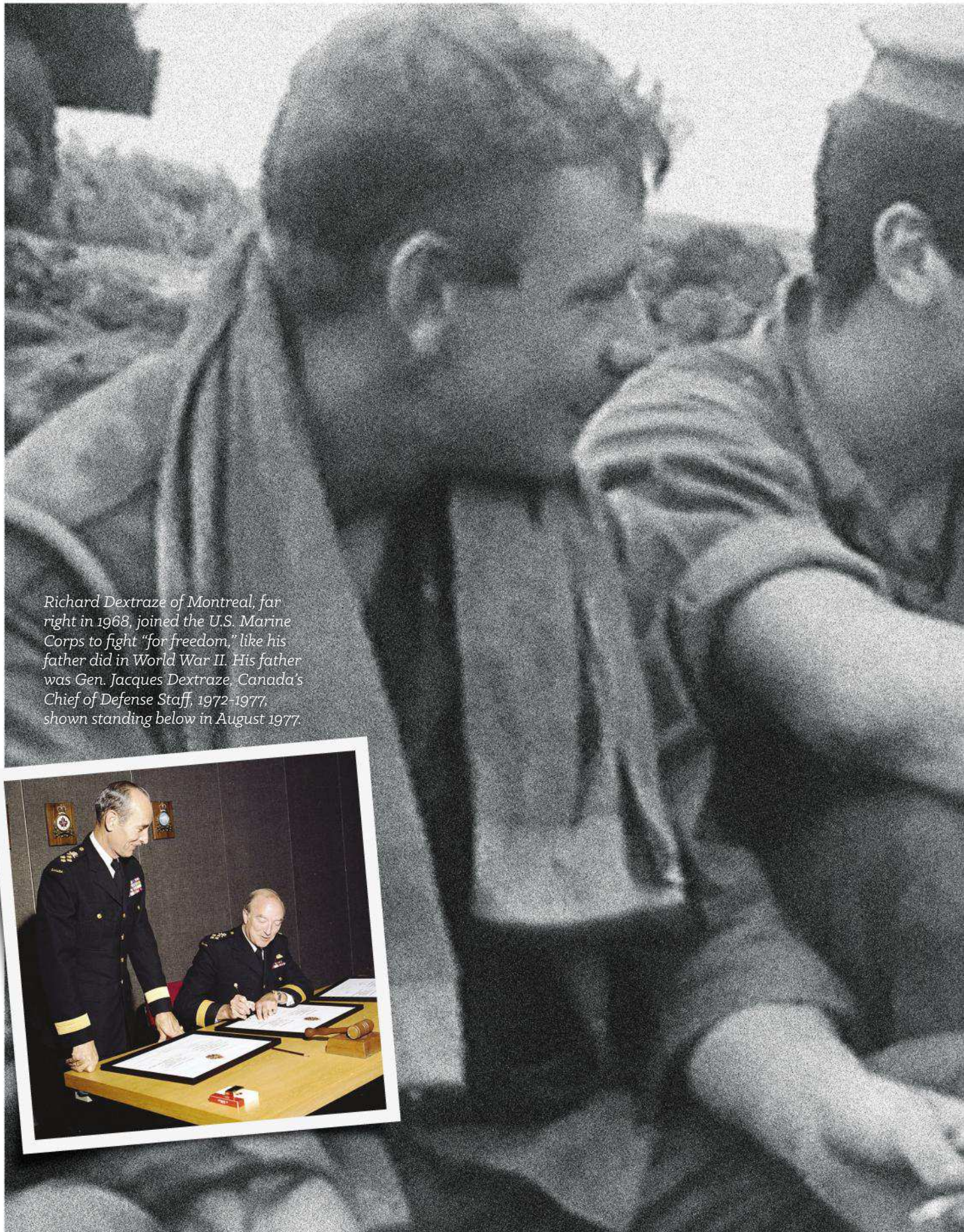
July 5 A USO troop being bused to Vung Tau, a seaside rest area near Saigon, to entertain American forces is ambushed by the VC. Two entertainers, bass player Phil Pill and drummer Curt Willis, are killed. Singer Paula Levine and keyboardist Jack Bone are wounded.

July 5 Deciding that the “fixed base was no longer necessary,” the Marines officially close the Khe Sanh base that had withstood a bloody siege by the North Vietnamese Army from Jan. 21 through April 8, when a relief force broke through. Dismantling of the base had begun June 19. On July 9 NVA soldiers raised the North Vietnamese flag over the abandoned base.

Aug. 17 The NVA and VC begin Phase III of the 1968 Tet Offensive—following attacks in January and May—by striking 27 cities and towns in South Vietnam, 47 airfields and 100 outposts. This final phase of Tet ended six weeks later, on Sept. 28. U.S. and South Vietnamese forces inflicted 30,000 enemy casualties (10,000 killed) while losing a small fraction of that number.


Aug. 30 About 200 mainly black inmates at the military's Long Binh Jail (LBJ in GI slang) near Saigon riot for nine days, burning several prison buildings and attacking guards as well as white inmates. One inmate is killed by the rioters, and 52 inmates and 63 military policemen are injured.

JULY 3: PICTORAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY; JULY 20: RICHARD CORMAN/SPECIAL OLYMPICS; JULY 28: TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY/ALAMY; AUG. 7: NATIONAL GENERAL/PHOTOFEST; AUG. 8: © WALLY MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES; AUG. 19: HISTORYNET ARCHIVES; AUG. 17: GUY ACETO; AUG. 28: GETTY IMAGES



Richard Dextraze of Montreal, far right in 1968, joined the U.S. Marine Corps to fight "for freedom," like his father did in World War II. His father was Gen. Jacques Dextraze, Canada's Chief of Defense Staff, 1972-1977, shown standing below in August 1977.





OH, CANADIANS

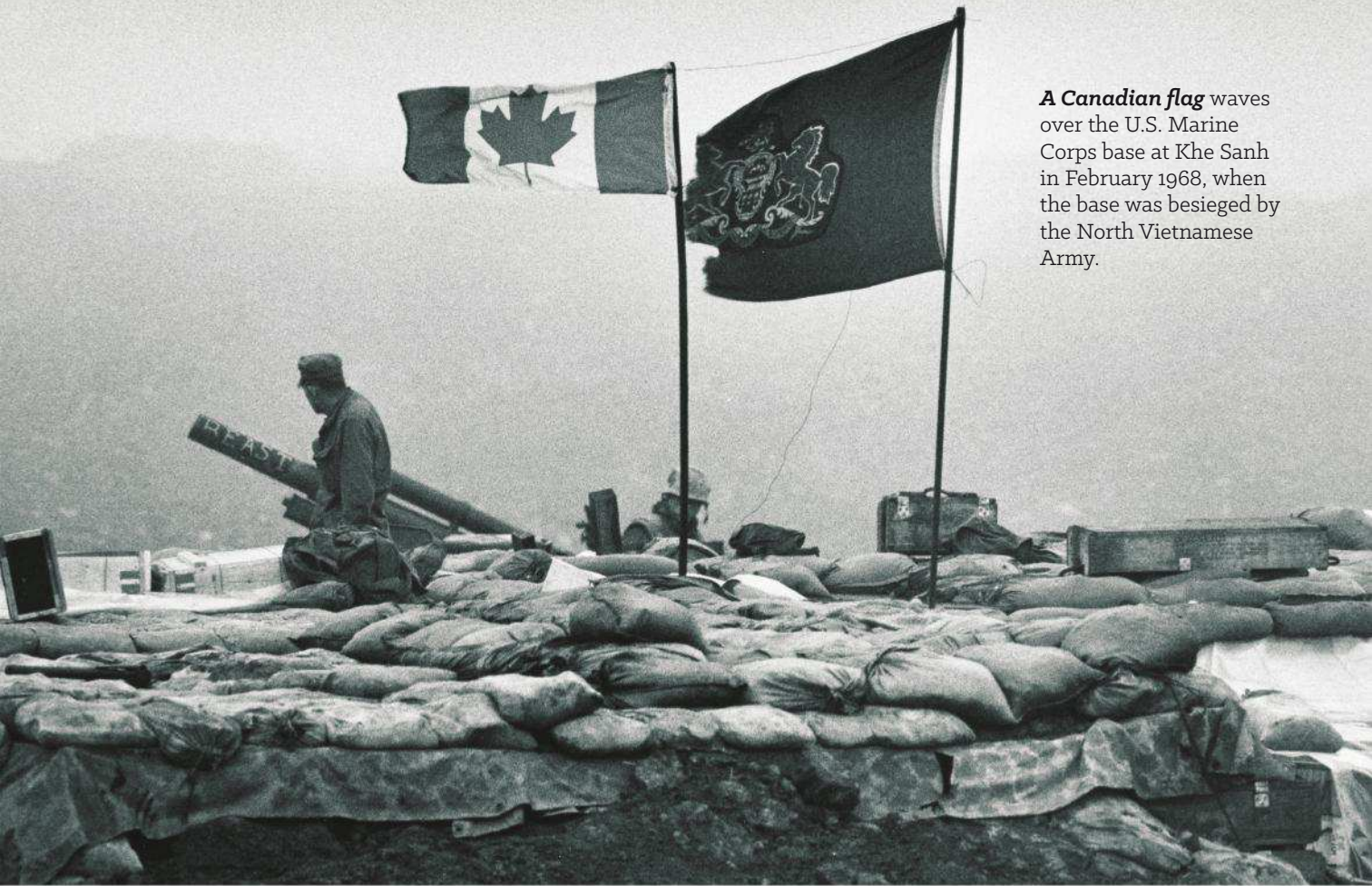
Some Americans went to Canada to avoid Vietnam.
Some Canadians went the other way

By Bob Gordon

Tom Tompkins enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1963. Five years later, he was a Special Forces sergeant in the middle of his second tour in Vietnam. On Oct. 30, 1968, Tompkins established a six-man observation post on a rocky hilltop near the Cambodian border. The North Vietnamese Army detected Tompkins' Green Berets and repeatedly attacked them. Despite multiple wounds and weakened from blood loss, the sergeant rallied the post's defenders to repulse the assaults. He also called in medevacs and directed airstrikes against the enemy. His "complete disregard for personal safety.... [and] gallantry in action" earned him a Bronze Star Medal with a "V" device for valor. He would subsequently be awarded the Silver Star as well.

Tompkins was a Canadian, born in Amherst, Nova Scotia, and a veteran of his home country's army. He served in the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers for five years, but wanted to practice his profession in combat. The American army sent him to Vietnam, twice. Between his first and second tours, Tompkins became an American citizen to qualify for the security clearance required for Special Forces training. When he returned from his final tour, Tompkins chose to remain in the United States.

Canada is widely portrayed as a haven for Americans who deserted or wanted to escape the draft during the Vietnam War. Although there are no definitive numbers, approximately 60,000 fled the United States for Canada, according to Fred Gaffen, who was a military historian at



A Canadian flag waves over the U.S. Marine Corps base at Khe Sanh in February 1968, when the base was besieged by the North Vietnamese Army.

the Canadian War Museum. However, about 30,000 Canadians joined American forces during the same period, with approximately 12,000 serving in Southeast Asia, Gaffen estimated. In the words of one U.S. Marine, quoted anonymously in *US Army Infantryman in Vietnam 1965-73*, by Gordon L. Rottman, “The worst of ours are going north, and the best of theirs are coming south.”

More than 100 Canadians were killed in Vietnam. Precise numbers are impossible to ascertain because many Canadians used American addresses of convenience when they enlisted and others simply lied about their nationality (although technically there was no need to do so because American citizenship isn’t required for service in the U.S. military). Some—but not all—of the Canadian dead are recognized at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, “the Wall,” in Washington, D.C.

In the strictest legal sense the young Canadians heading south to join U.S. forces were violating the law—specifically, Canada’s Foreign Enlistment Act of 1937. At that time, it was estimated that 1,200 men had left to fight in the Spanish Civil War, which had begun in 1936 and pitted the fascist-influenced Nationalists against the more democratic Republicans, supported by the Canadian volunteers.

A Canadian formation, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, or Mac-Paps, had been created as part of the XV International Brigade. Prime Minister William Lyon

Mackenzie King, a master of avoidance, procrastination and vacillation, was terrified of the diplomatic problems this might present. His government passed the Foreign Enlistment Act, barring Canadians from joining foreign military forces or recruiting other Canadians to serve in foreign military forces.

The act states: “Any person who being a Canadian national, whether within or residing outside Canada, voluntarily accepts or agrees to accept any commission or engagement in the armed forces of any foreign state at war with any friendly state, is guilty of an offense of this act.”

Thirty years later, as Canadians joined the U.S. military and fought in Vietnam, the act remained on the books. However, there are no reported cases of anyone ever being convicted under the act.

There was even talk of creating a unit along the lines of the Mac-Paps battalion. In 1966 the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. interviewed Don Echlin, identified only as a “Toronto man,” who was attempting to raise a Canadian unit to serve in Vietnam. “American commitment in Southeast Asia has to be maintained and it has to be supported,” he told the CBC. Echlin envisaged a Canadian Corps fighting alongside American forces. Despite his appeals to Canada’s federal government, no such legion materialized.

This is unsurprising, since Canada was officially one of the “referees” of the conflict. Since 1954 it had been

the senior partner in the International Control Commission, charged with overseeing the implementation of the 1954 Geneva Accords governing the partition of Vietnam after the end of French colonial rule.

Two decades later Canada would provide nearly 300 peacekeepers to Operation Gallant, monitoring the cease-fire in South Vietnam as part of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords. Echlin dismissed this diplomatic maneuvering as a “government way out, something they are using as an excuse to not shed Canadian blood,” but the official stance was strict neutrality.

Bob Beatty, of Winnipeg, Manitoba, was willing to shed his blood to stop the spread of communism. “The American government was telling us that the communists were trying to infiltrate into Southeast Asia,” he recalled in a 1986 CBC interview. “I felt that if I’m going to fight communism I should fight it in a foreign country.” Beatty enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1968.

Artilleryman Pfc. Brian O’Connell, from Montreal, served in Vietnam in 1967 with C Battery, 1st Battalion, 12th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division.

Edward Bowes, a Nova Scotian, also was spurred by an ideological commitment and the politics of the war to enlist in the American cause. But he made his decision after witnessing an anti-war demonstration in Ottawa. The protestors

were “hippies, yippies and draft dodgers.... Self-righteous, self-appointed moral guardians,” he said. “So I decided to go and find out myself. I journeyed to Bangor, Maine, enlisted in the United States Army, and volunteered to serve in the Republic of Vietnam.”

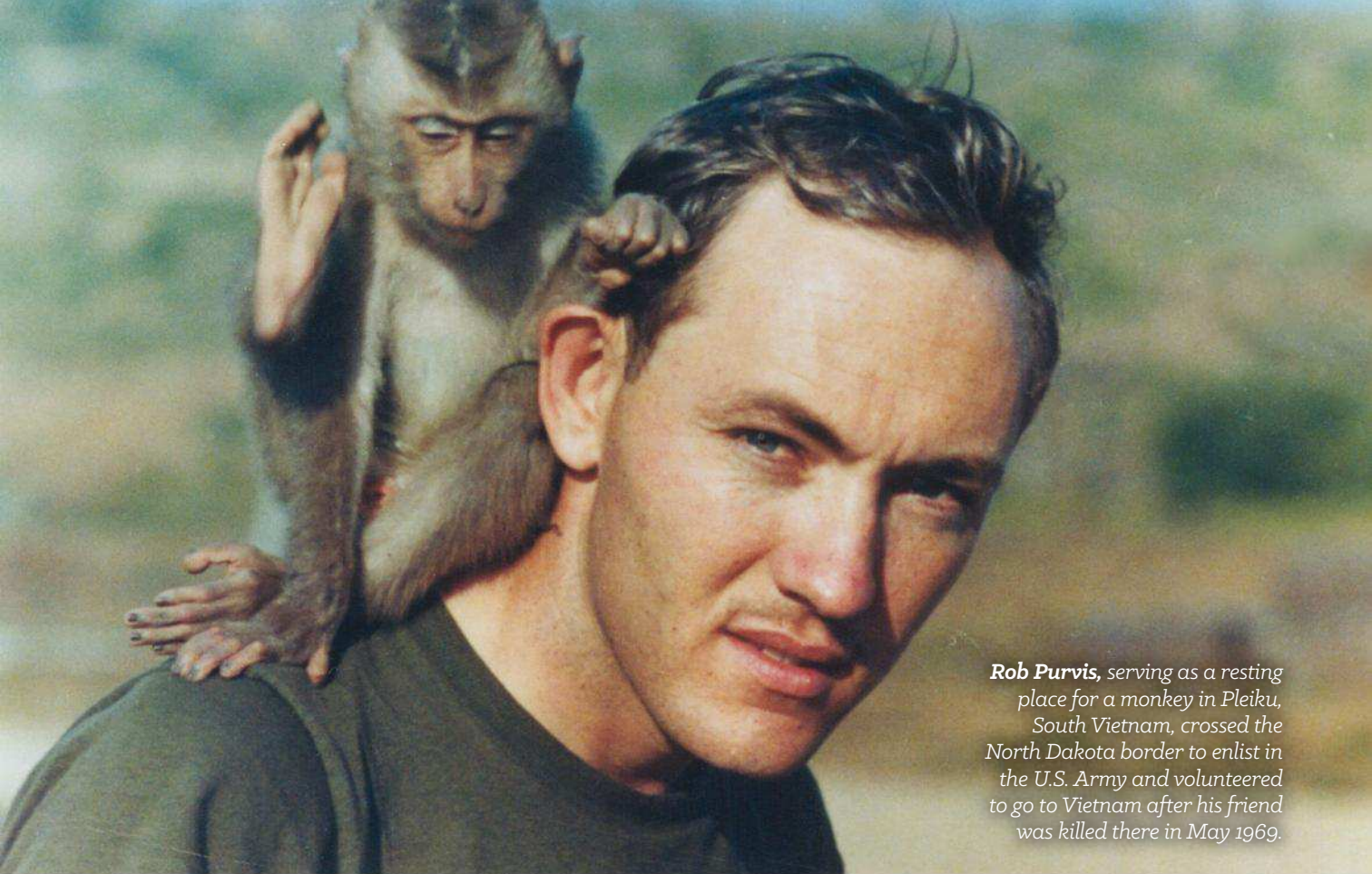
Most Canadian volunteers, however, were apolitical, motivated by a broad spectrum of opinions, attitudes and emotions.

Some of the professional soldiers in Canada’s military enlisted in the U.S. forces to get combat experience, as had Tompkins, the Special Forces hero. In 1962, after five years in the Canadian army, Gerald Girolodi, a native of Woodstock, Ontario, declined to re-up so he could enlist in the Marine Corps. In 1965 he requested, and was granted, a tour in Vietnam. He ended his career as a drill instructor at Parris Island, South Carolina, and wrote a Vietnam War novel, *Broken Time*.

A substantial number of Canadian Vietnam veterans had a significant family figure—usually a father or an uncle—who served in World War II or Korea. The role modeled by a close relative is the most common thread among Canadians who joined the fight in Vietnam.

The premier example of that relationship was Marine Lance Cpl. Richard Dextraze, fatally wounded on April 23, 1969, while patrolling near the Demilitarized Zone that separated North and South Vietnam. Dextraze lost his life serving U.S. forces in Vietnam while





Rob Purvis, serving as a resting place for a monkey in Pleiku, South Vietnam, crossed the North Dakota border to enlist in the U.S. Army and volunteered to go to Vietnam after his friend was killed there in May 1969.

his father was serving in the highest echelons of the Canadian forces.

Gen. Jacques Dextraze fought in World War II, led Canada's Royal 22nd Regiment in Korea and was chief of the Canadian Defense Staff from 1972 to 1977. Jacques Dextraze asked Richard why he didn't join the Canadian forces, and the son replied that Canada wasn't at war with anyone. "I want to do my share," Richard told him. "You fought in the last war for freedom and I'd like to go for a couple of years. When I come back I'll feel a better man. I'll feel I've contributed."

Rob Purvis, co-founder of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Association, and three buddies enlisted together in the U.S. Army during the spring of 1968. "All our fathers had been Second World War veterans," he said.

But like some other Canadians who signed up, the four friends didn't give any real serious thought to what they were doing and what the consequences might be. They just decided one day that they would head for North Dakota's Grand Forks induction center. "We were just young and really naive kids," Purvis confessed. "We all were watching the news every night with the war in Vietnam, and war seemed exciting, adventurous.... I don't know why. We just went and did it." There was no more thought to it than that.

Purvis was stationed not in Vietnam, but in Panama with the 8th Special Forces Group, and spent a year there. His friend Larry Collins did go to Vietnam and was killed in May 1969. "When Larry was killed, I volunteered for Vietnam," Purvis said.

Arthur Diabo, a Mohawk born on the Kahnawake reserve south of Montreal and living in New York's Bronx borough, was another adventure seeker. "You're young and strong and you want to use that energy, and Vietnam was a good place to do that," he said, then added, "Vietnam was a good place...for about two weeks. After that, you just tried to stay alive."

One Canadian who joined the U.S. military in a fit of wanderlust, Charles James "Mike" Phelps of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, had no idea he would end up in Vietnam during a war. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in October 1963 solely to get away from home and broaden his horizons. About a year and half later, in March 1965, the first U.S. combat troops landed in Vietnam.

Kirk Leavesley, who had spent his teen years homeless on the streets of Winnipeg and then crisscrossed North America, wasn't searching for another adventure but rather "felt he wanted a little discipline in his life." He traveled to Minneapolis in October 1967 to join the Marine Corps. But Leavesley later admitted he hated it and had bitten off more than he could chew.

Some Canadians living in the United States, like many of their American-born neighbors, were less-than-enthusiastic about the war. And they also were subject to the draft. U.S. law requires draft-age noncitizens to register with Selective Service System (although they may be exempt from induction if they meet certain criteria). When faced with the prospect of a draft notice, some Canadians—like some Americans—opted to volunteer for military service, which would give them more choice in

the branch of service or specialty.

After 19-year-old Timothy Labute, a Canadian citizen living in Detroit, received a draft notice for Army service in 1966, he voluntarily enlisted in the U.S. Air Force for a three-year tour to avoid two years in the infantry and the risk of a combat assignment in Vietnam. William Bricker, a Canadian living in Newport Beach, California, also enlisted in the Air Force when he was ordered to register for the draft.

Les Brown, a Canadian citizen who had lived in California since his family moved there in 1957 when he was 8 years old, received a draft notice in early 1969. Initially, he fled to his grandmother's home in Wakefield, Quebec, but later returned to the United States, optimistically hoping that enrolling for a degree in police science at a local college would earn him a deferment. It didn't, and Brown was inducted. Even so, he thought his college major might earn him a "safe" specialty, such as the military police. But Brown soon found himself in Lai Khe, 40 miles north of Saigon, with Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division.

Medal of Honor recipient U.S. Army Sgt. Peter C. Lemon is frequently cited as the only Canadian to receive the award during the Vietnam War. The "Canadian" label is tenuous at best. Although born in the heart of southern Ontario tobacco country, Lemon moved with his family to Alabaster, Michigan, as a young boy and became a U.S. citizen before his teens. He volunteered for Army service in 1968 at age 18.

The Medal of Honor recognized Lemon's actions on April 1, 1970, when he was a specialist 4 in E Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), at Fire Base Illingworth, northwest of Saigon, near the Cambodian border.

The base was positioned along a North Vietnamese Army supply route. American commanders hoped to use Illingworth as bait to draw NVA troops into a fight and then blast them with artillery from the base and nearby locations. The troops inside the base included two companies of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, and a few artillery batteries.

Shortly after 2 a.m. on April 1, the NVA fired hundreds of rounds from mortars, rockets and recoilless rifles and then rushed the base with a force of approximately 400 infantrymen. Fierce fighting followed. Suddenly, a tremendous blast enveloped the battlefield as an ammunition dump exploded, stunning both sides and temporarily shutting down the combat. The firing resumed, but the NVA force had lost its momentum, and by 5 a.m. the attack had been repulsed. The American losses totaled 25 killed and more than 50 wounded.

While the attack still raged, Lemon was repeatedly wounded but continued to battle the attackers. He fought them at close range with machine gun and rifle. When those weapons broke down, Lemon turned to grenades and sometimes hand-to-hand combat. At one point, according to the Medal of Honor citation, he found an operable M60 machine gun, grabbed it and "stood atop an embankment fully exposed to enemy fire and placed ef-



fective fire upon the enemy until he collapsed from his multiple wounds and exhaustion."

After regaining consciousness at an aid station, he was evacuated, but made sure that the more seriously wounded troops went first on the medevac helicopters. Today he lives in the United States. Undeniably courageous, Lemon is hardly a Canadian.

Canada's official neutrality and the extra-legal status of the country's Vietnam veterans, coupled with widespread popular distaste for the war among the Canadian public, meant that the returning troops confronted the same wall of silence that American veterans faced in the United States.

Jim Devlin, of Toronto, had served as a helicopter door gunner in D Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), beginning in July 1968, but discovered upon returning home in 1970 that most people weren't interested in his combat experience.

Other veterans recall an attitude of detachment, tinged with disdain. "When I came back and brought up the subject, it was always 'Who cares?'" Ron Parkes, one of the co-founders of the CVVA and the organization's current president, told the CBC in 2015. "We weren't there. We weren't in it."

The Royal Canadian Legion, the country's largest veterans organization, also snubbed the Vietnam gener-

Peter C. Lemon,
a U.S. Army sergeant,
was the sole
Canadian-born
recipient of the Medal
of Honor in Vietnam.

ation. The first time veteran Mike Gilhooley tried to get a drink at his local Legion hall using his U.S. military ID, he was told, "We don't take Americans in the Canadian Legion." Gilhooley was from Ville St. Michel in Quebec province and had enlisted in Plattsburg, New York. He served with the 1st Cav and 507th Transportation Group.

Devlin heard Canadian Vietnam veterans referred to as "mercenaries." He noted with a chuckle: "Mercenaries don't serve for a private's pay."

Recognition from the Legion came only haltingly. In Canada, veterans are memorialized annually on Remembrance Day, Nov. 11, the date of the 1918 armistice that ended World War I. Ceremonies are held at monuments across the country. It wasn't until the late 1970s that Vietnam veterans were invited to join a Remembrance Day ceremony. The invitation was extended by veterans of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, at the eastern end of Lake Ontario. In 1987 the Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario districts of the Legion became the first to permit plaques recognizing Vietnam veterans to be placed on military monuments. Finally, in 1994, al-



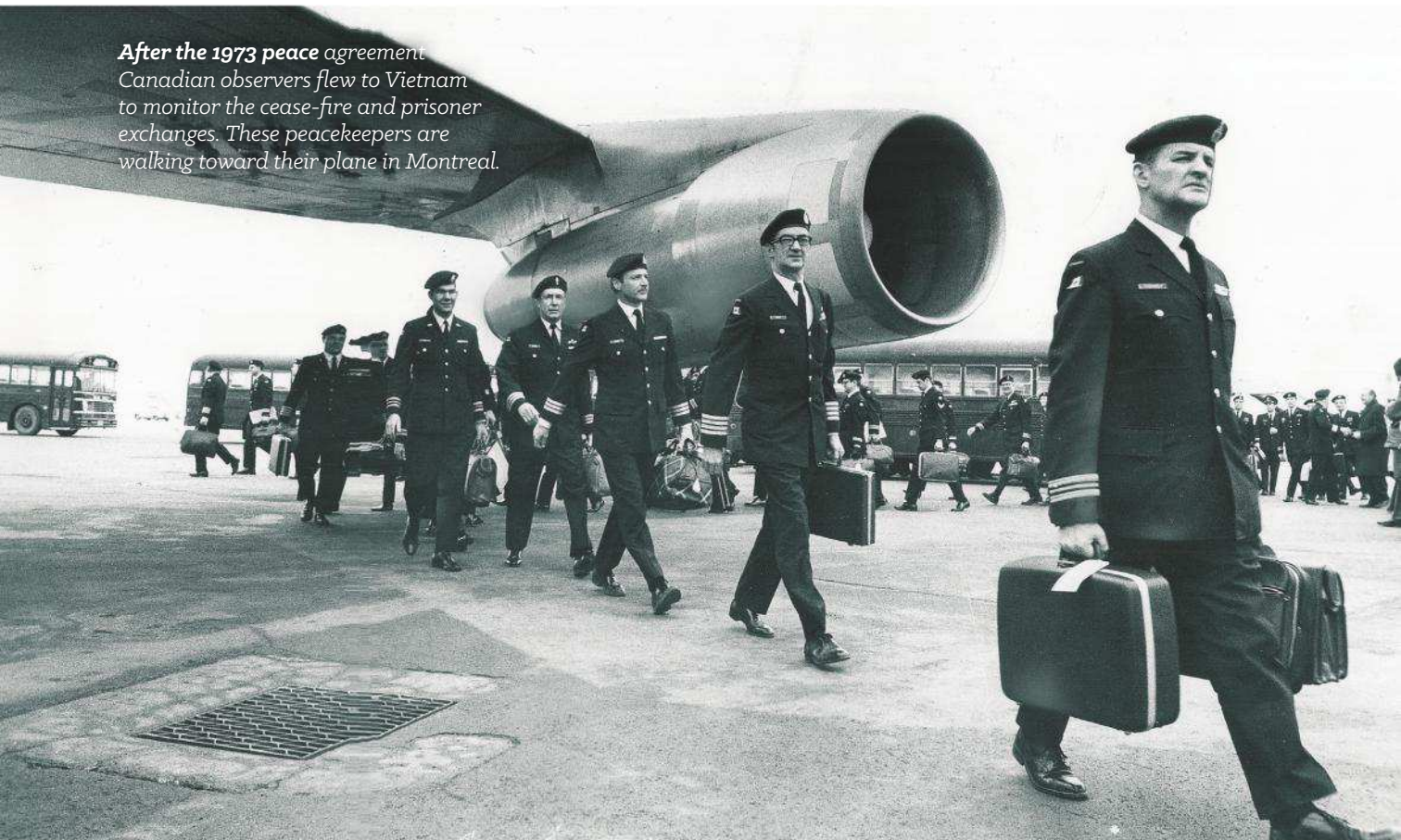
Engaging a sniper near Da Nang in 1967, Lance Cpl. Kenneth Korolyk had left Vancouver and gone to Vietnam with E Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division.

most two decades after the war ended, the Royal Canadian Legion officially recognized Canadian Vietnam veterans for regular membership.

Leavesley, the former U.S. Marine, was even more disappointed in the attitude of many Americans. "I lost all respect for the USA in their total rejection of Vietnam vets and their denial of what had happened," he said. "It was an unpopular war, and there was a sense of embarrassment that pervaded the general population."

Purvis and Parkes created the CVVA as response to the lack of acknowledgement of the veterans' service in Vietnam, the cold shoulder from veterans of other wars and the feeling of isolation that many Vietnam veterans felt. In the mid-1980s Purvis, who had not spoken to another Vietnam veteran since his discharge, saw a newspaper story about a Canadian veteran of the war. The article inspired him to send "letters to the editor" to papers across the country, asking other Vietnam veterans to join them.

After the 1973 peace agreement Canadian observers flew to Vietnam to monitor the cease-fire and prisoner exchanges. These peacekeepers are walking toward their plane in Montreal.



TOP: SGT W. F. DICKMAN/US MARINE CORPS/NATIONAL ARCHIVES; BOTTOM: DON DUTTON/TORONTO STAR VIA GETTY IMAGES



The North Wall in Windsor, Ontario, was dedicated in 1995 to remember Canadians who were killed or listed as missing in Vietnam.

A handful of them met for coffee in Winnipeg in 1985 and hatched the CVVA. They spent a year organizing a pilgrimage to the Wall in Washington for a CVVA reunion in September 1986. That event was attended by 100 vets—from British Columbia to Newfoundland—and three silver cross mothers, the equivalent of gold star mothers in the United States.

Initially, the CVVA had branches in communities across Canada. However, with the passing of time and veterans, the organization has become largely moribund.

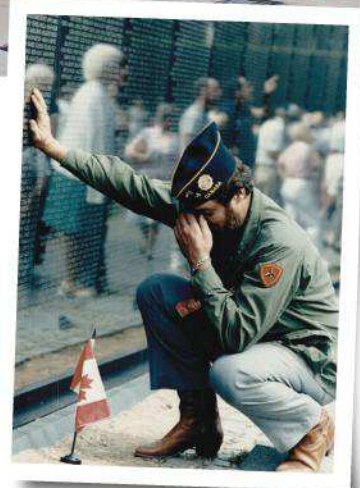
The Canadian government has never formally acknowledged that its citizens who fought with U.S. forces in Vietnam are veterans or officially recognized their service. And Devlin believes it never will. He recalls telling fellow veterans 30 years ago: “It wasn’t Canada’s war. They’re not going to do anything for you, and they don’t have to. So why bother?”

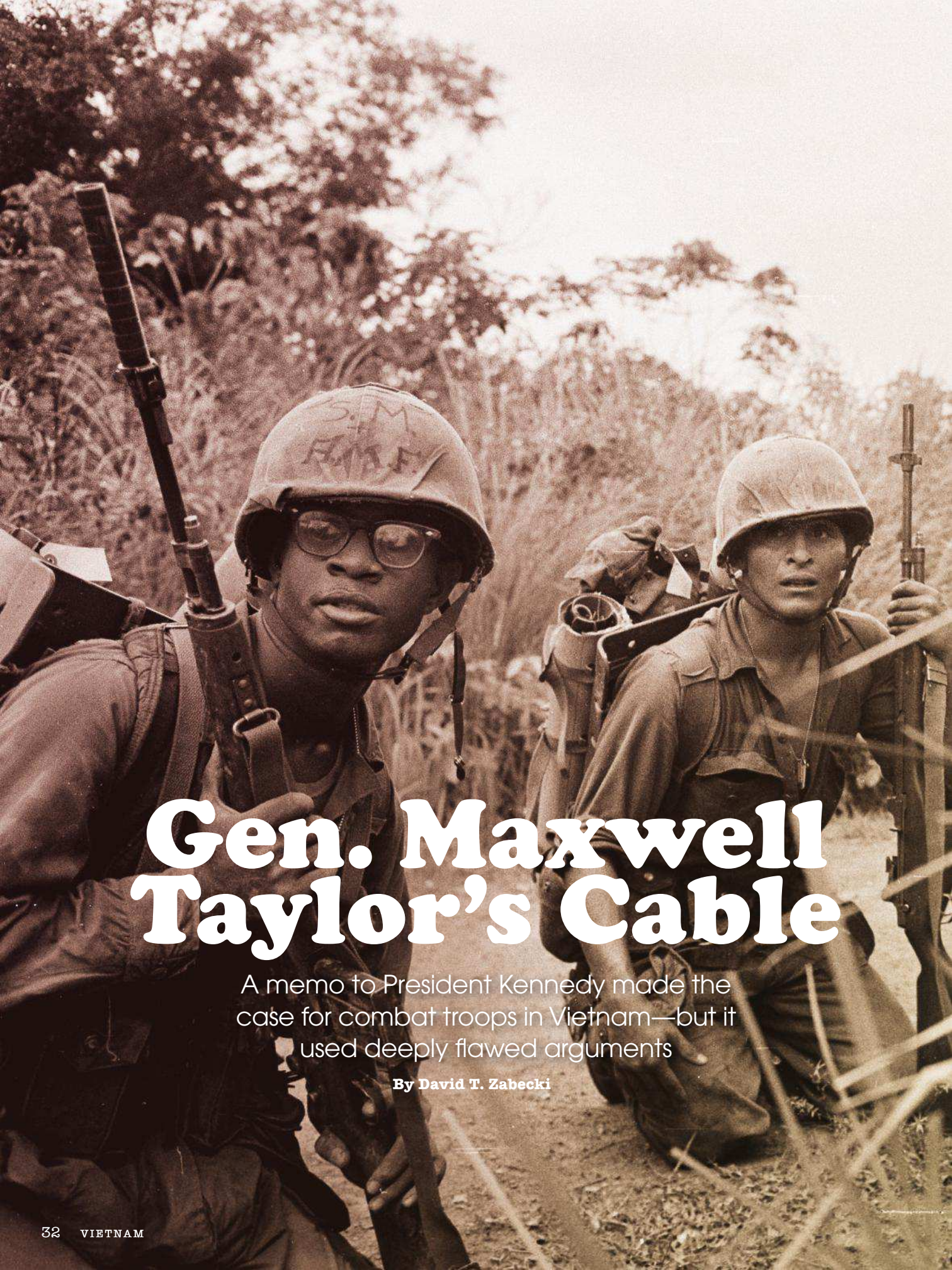
However, there is now a monument to Canadian Vietnam veterans. Canadians killed or missing in action are memorialized in Windsor, Ontario, at the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the “North Wall.” It is made of black granite like the Wall in Washington and was financed by the Michigan Association of Concerned Veterans. The monument, officially unveiled on July 2, 1995, lists 103 names. (The Wall in Washington is inscribed with more than 58,000 names.) Purvis said he is “very impressed with it,” adding “not quite as prominent as the one in Washington, but I appreciated it.”

Canadian veterans, like this Toronto man, join their American comrades at the Wall in Washington, D.C., to honor the fallen.

In surveying the experience of Canadian Vietnam veterans, the diversity of their motivations for enlisting in the U.S. forces during Vietnam stands out. Some were stern anti-communists, but few were motivated by strong ideological or political positions. Others joined out of youthful exuberance, a chance to broaden their horizons or even a quest for more discipline in their lives. The most common reason was an influential role model or mentor who was a veteran. They also had in common a shared bond with American veterans who came home to a public that did not want to hear about or even acknowledge their service. ▼

Bob Gordon is a Canadian historian specializing in military and social history for a general audience. His work has appeared in newspapers and magazines in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. Gordon is a regular contributor to Esprit De Corps and Halifax Magazine.






Gen. Maxwell Taylor's Cable

A memo to President Kennedy made the case for combat troops in Vietnam—but it used deeply flawed arguments

By David T. Zabecki



Gen. Maxwell Taylor, an aide to President John F. Kennedy, recommended in November 1961 that the United States send ground combat forces to Vietnam. Kennedy demurred, but within a few years the jungles would be filled with troops like these from the 1st Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment, facing sniper fire in September 1966 just south of the Demilitarized Zone.

In World War II, Maj. Gen. Maxwell Taylor, shown here in 1945, commanded the 101st Airborne Division.



Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor had a greater influence than any other military officer on America's decision to go to war in Vietnam—and on the early strategy to fight that conflict. The strategic framework he helped establish, and the key assumptions upon which it was based, cast a long shadow over U.S. military operations all the way through to 1975.

When Taylor retired from the military in July 1959, after serving as the chief of staff of the U.S. Army, he was one of the most well-known generals in America. The commander of the 101st Airborne Division when it jumped into Normandy on June 5-6, 1944, Taylor, along with Matthew B. Ridgway and James M. Gavin, formed a trio of legendary airborne generals. Throughout the 1950s, all three were leading voices among the “Never

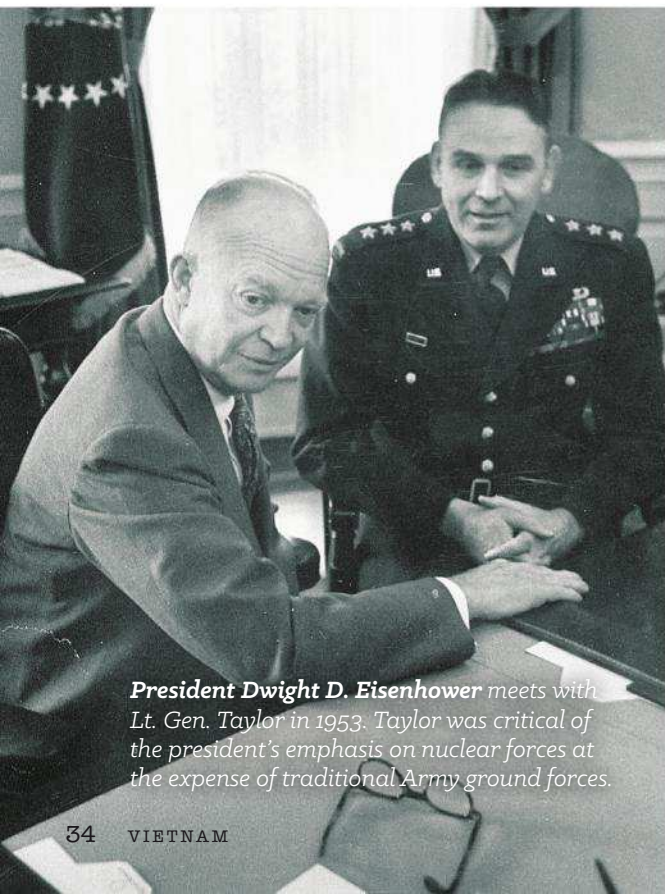
Again” bloc of senior military leaders who had seen the disastrous experience of the Korean War and vowed that the United States should never again fight a ground war on the Asian mainland.

As Army chief of staff in 1954, Ridgway had dissented from a Joint Chiefs of Staff proposal to use American air power to save the French garrison in Vietnam at Dien Bien Phu, under attack by Viet Minh forces fighting for independence from France. Ridgway, a four-star general, and Gavin, a lieutenant general, remained critics of the Vietnam War right until the end, and some detractors branded them “dove generals.” Taylor, however, changed course in the early 1960s to become the chief military enabler of American involvement in Vietnam.

All three generals had something else in common during the 1950s. They were staunch critics of the “New Look” national defense policy of their former wartime commander and the current president, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Focused on containing defense costs, New Look shifted the national emphasis from conventional ground forces to air and nuclear-capable forces, embodied in the Strategic Air Command. The resulting doctrine of “massive retaliation” was based on the premise of “more bang for the buck,” but it was really an all-or-nothing strategic straitjacket.

Ridgway opposed Eisenhower's plans to reduce the size of the Army, arguing that air power and nuclear weapons did not eliminate or even reduce the need for robust ground forces capable of seizing territory and controlling populations. The tensions between the Army chief of staff and the president rose to such a point that Eisenhower did not retain Ridgway for a second two-year term in office—he picked Taylor as his new chief of staff in June 1955.

Gavin, too, was a staunch critic of massive retaliation. During an appearance in January 1958 before the Senate Armed Services Preparedness Subcommittee, chaired by Texas Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson, he was asked for an estimate of casualties in a nuclear war and gave a shocking answer: 425 million. Gavin saw the need for other types of forces. As the Army's chief of research and development during the mid-1950s, he was an early advocate of highly mobile and air transportable forces, the



President Dwight D. Eisenhower meets with Lt. Gen. Taylor in 1953. Taylor was critical of the president's emphasis on nuclear forces at the expense of traditional Army ground forces.

modern “air cavalry.” His vision became the foundation for the Army UH-1 “Huey” helicopters and airmobile units in Vietnam.

During Taylor’s four-year tenure as chief of staff, he remained critical of Eisenhower’s defense strategy, but he played his cards close to the vest. Once he retired from the Army, however, Taylor became far more vocal in his criticisms of Eisenhower’s New Look policy. His 1960 book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, was met with widespread critical acclaim. Printed boldly on the book’s dust jacket, “General Taylor Contends:”

- That the doctrine of massive retaliation has endangered our national security.
- That our military planning is frozen to the requirements of general war.
- That the weaknesses in the Joint Chiefs of Staff system have left the planning of our military strategy to civilian amateurs and the budget makers.

In line with the thinking of Ridgway and Gavin and other senior generals of the 1950s, Taylor quite correctly argued that America needed a far broader range of military resources to give it a “flexible response” capability, rather than an all-or-nothing reliance on massive retaliation.

His book had considerable influence on the Vietnam policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, but not necessarily in the ways Taylor might have envisioned. As Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster detailed in his important 1997 book, *Dereliction of Duty*, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and his “Whiz Kids” of systems analysts and bean counters corrupted the concept of “flexible response” into the “incremental response” that used escalations of military force to send the North Vietnamese signals of the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam. Taylor ultimately supported that policy. The piecemeal application of force, the hallmark of American strategy

Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson, chairman of the Preparedness Subcommittee in 1958, takes a moment with Lt. Gen. James Gavin, a promoter of the air cavalry concept.



Army Chief of Staff Matthew Ridgway, left, confers with Taylor on June 23, 1955. Taylor became Army chief on June 30.

in Vietnam, is one of the cardinal sins of warfare that military strategist Carl von Clausewitz warned against 200 years ago.

Taylor’s book got the attention of Massachusetts Sen. John F. Kennedy during his 1960 presidential campaign. In one of his early acts as president, Kennedy appointed Taylor to head a special study group to investigate the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in April 1961. The panel’s final report confirmed the new president’s suspicion that he had been ill-served by the advice the Joint Chiefs had given him. To ease his reliance on them, Kennedy recalled Taylor to active duty in July 1961 and appointed him to the newly created position of military representative to the president. There was no precedent or constitutional foundation for the position.

In his book, Taylor had detailed many legitimate problems with the Joint Chiefs of Staff system, but his position as the president’s military *eminence grise* only made those problems worse. Taylor usurped the Joint Chiefs, cutting them out of the decision-making process and widening the gap between the nation’s military and civilian leadership, a problem that remained throughout the Vietnam years.

By the spring of 1961, Southeast Asia loomed ever larger on the list of international crises facing the administration. American military advisers had been in Vietnam in small numbers since President Harry S. Truman deployed them in 1950 to assist the French. At the start of 1961, when Kennedy came into office, there had been about 900 American advisers in Vietnam. By the end of that year, the number had ballooned to 3,205. But no combat forces were in Vietnam.

Kennedy had inherited from Eisenhower a Vietnam policy that the *Pentagon Papers* called “limited risk.” Kennedy, however, came into office with a far more muscular vision of America’s role in the world. In his inaugural address, he had declared that America was prepared to “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order



Joint Chiefs Chairman Taylor and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, just back from a trip to Vietnam, update President John F. Kennedy on Oct. 2, 1963.

to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”

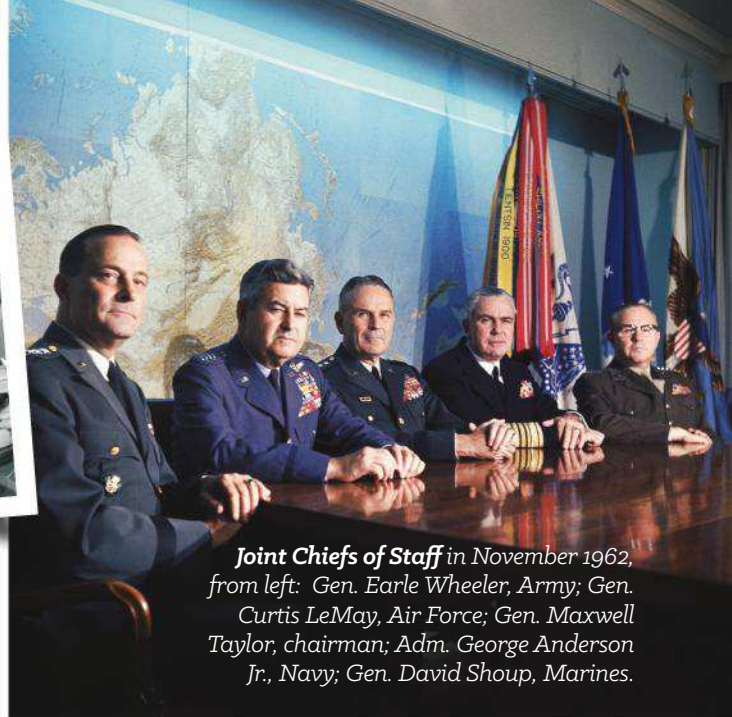
A goal of spreading liberty and democracy throughout the world sounds good, but there was not—nor still is—any universally accepted definition of what those two principles really mean. South Vietnamese

President Ngo Dinh Diem, whose repressive government tried to squelch political opposition, obviously had views on the matter that were radically different from those espoused by most of the Kennedy administration’s “Best and Brightest.”

The new president’s foreign policy vision soon ran up against reality. Not only had the Bay of Pigs operation been a fiasco, but Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was increasing pressure on the United States to withdraw from West Berlin. During the June 1961 Kennedy-Khrushchev Summit in Vienna, the old and wily Soviet *apparatchik* roughly handled the young and inexperienced president. When Kennedy returned to Washington, he told James Reston, Washington bureau chief of *The New York Times*, “We have a problem in making our power credible, and it looks like Vietnam is the place.” A little more than two months later, on Aug. 13, the Berlin Wall started going up.

In October 1961 Kennedy sent Taylor and Deputy National Security Adviser Walt Rostow to Vietnam on a fact-finding mission. Taylor recognized that the United States was facing a double-crisis of confidence in Vietnam. First, there were grave doubts about America’s determination to hold the line against communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Second, there was widespread skepticism—both inside and outside of Vietnam—that Diem’s government could defeat the communists.

On his way back to the United States, Taylor put his initial thoughts in a Nov. 1 cable he sent to Kennedy from the Philippines. It began: “This message is for the purpose of presenting my reasons for recommending the introduction of a US military force into SVN [South Vietnam]. I have reached the conclusion that this is an essential action if we are to reverse the present downward trend of events in spite of a full recognition of the following disadvantages.”



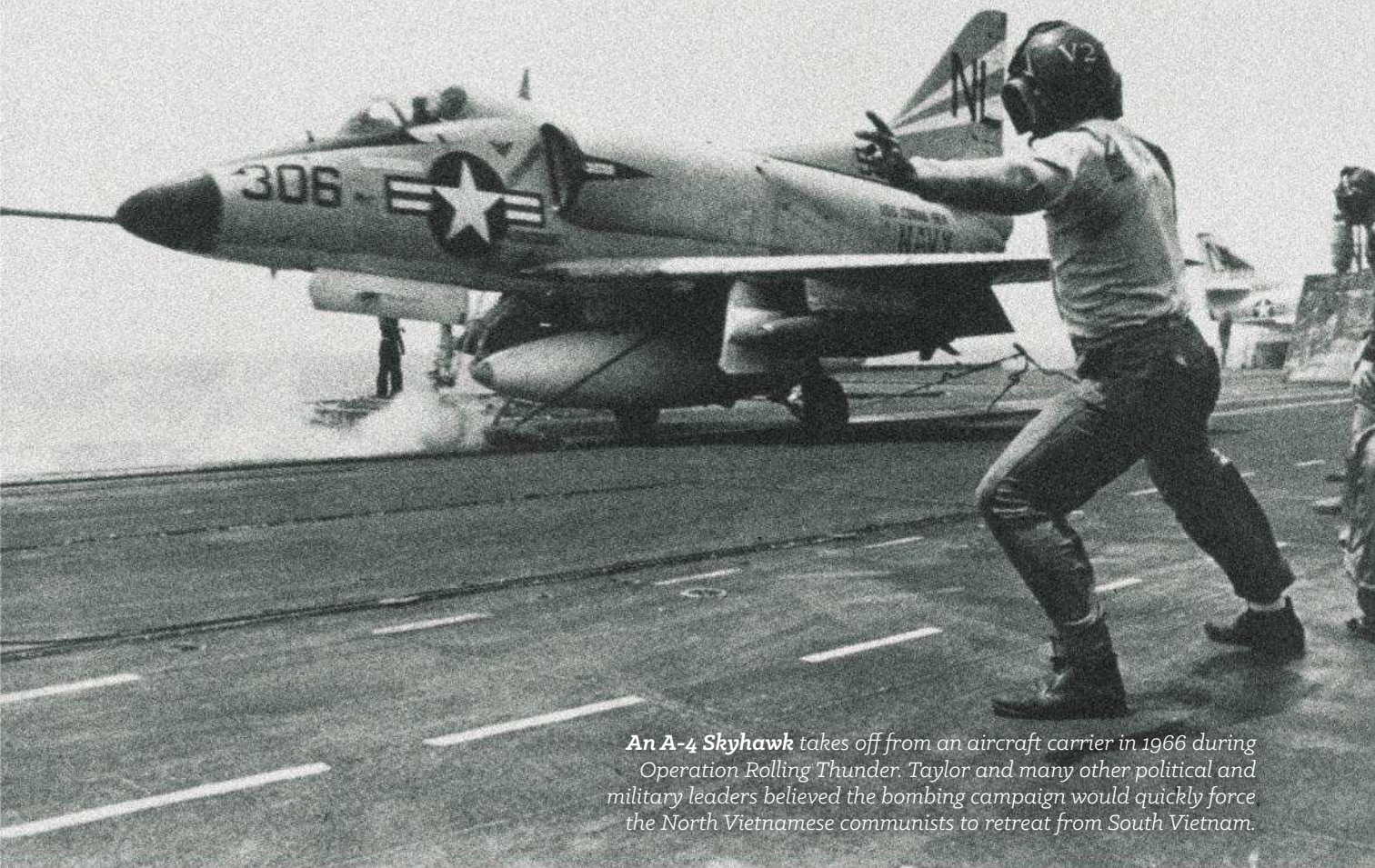
Joint Chiefs of Staff in November 1962, from left: Gen. Earle Wheeler, Army; Gen. Curtis LeMay, Air Force; Gen. Maxwell Taylor, chairman; Adm. George Anderson Jr., Navy; Gen. David Shoup, Marines.

Taylor noted first that America’s strategic reserve forces were already spread paper-thin with missions throughout the world, and he was concerned about committing any of those forces to “a peripheral area of the Communist bloc,” where they might become pinned down. That “peripheral” area was Southeast Asia, a characterization that would certainly change within a few years, but Taylor wrote his cable less than three months after the Berlin Wall went up, and tensions in Europe were running high.

The strain on the U.S. military from its global commitments, which intensified during the Vietnam War, should have been remedied by at least a partial mobilization of the Reserve forces, with some being put on active duty in Vietnam. But political leaders, especially Johnson, when he became president, could never bring themselves to make that decision. As a result, U.S. forces assigned to NATO in Europe were progressively stripped to skeleton formations to feed the troop buildups in Vietnam, making NATO perilously vulnerable to aggressive Soviet actions.

In his memo, Taylor also pointed out that by committing ground forces to Vietnam, the United States would be staking even more of its international prestige on the conflict there. After the bloodshed of the communists’ Tet Offensive in 1968 turned more Americans against the war, the original U.S. objective—halting the spread of communism and ensuring the sovereignty of the Republic of South Vietnam—was replaced with a new goal: get out of there while “saving face.” In the end, the United States didn’t even achieve that objective.

Additionally, Taylor warned that if the first contingent of U.S. ground troops proved insufficient to stabilize South Vietnam, there would be pressure to reinforce them with more men, which would be difficult to resist and might mean “no limit to our possible commitment (unless we attack the source in Hanoi).” As the *Pentagon Papers* document, up through the Tet Offensive, the United States had, in fact fallen into a policy of “unlim-



An A-4 Skyhawk takes off from an aircraft carrier in 1966 during Operation Rolling Thunder. Taylor and many other political and military leaders believed the bombing campaign would quickly force the North Vietnamese communists to retreat from South Vietnam.

ited commitment,” something far different from “limited risk” policy of the Eisenhower administration.

In his final caveat, Taylor said the introduction of American combat units could increase regional tensions and lead to a massive Chinese intervention, witnessed a decade earlier in Korea. Fortunately, Vietnam did not spin out of control to become World War III-East, but it turned out to be a larger war than Korea—exactly the type of war on the Asian mainland that Taylor and the “Never-Again” bloc had once warned against.

Taylor, however, did not envision the type of large force that eventually characterized America’s commitment in Vietnam. He made clear the primary functions of his recommended combat force:

1. Provide a military presence to raise South Vietnamese morale and demonstrate America’s intention to prevent a communist takeover of Southeast Asia.
2. Support flood relief operations in the Mekong Delta, which was the fundamental fig leaf for the entire intervention.
3. Conduct necessary combat operations for self-defense.
4. Provide an emergency reserve for the South Vietnamese.
5. Act as an advance party for the introduction of any follow-on American forces that the situation might require. It was this function that ultimately served as the mechanism for America taking over the war.

Even in the beginning, a light, token combat force would not suffice, Taylor said, but he suggested that 8,000 troops would be enough to secure his stated missions. The proposed American force would not be used to clear the jungles of Viet Cong guerrillas, he said. “That should be the primary task of the Armed Forces of Vietnam,” which would be organized and trained for that mission, with ample support from U.S. advisers down to the battalion level. Although the American troops were operating in an advisory role, they could be “called upon to engage in combat to protect themselves,” the general added.

In support of his recommendation, Taylor made several strategic and tactical assessments—which proved to be stunningly wrong, but haunted U.S. operations throughout the conflict. For example, Taylor incredibly claimed that South Vietnam was “not an excessively difficult or unpleasant place to operate. While the border areas are rugged and heavily forested, the terrain is comparable to parts of Korea where U.S. troops learned to live and work without too much effort.” Most Americans who served in ground combat units in Vietnam would be hard-pressed to agree with his characterization of the country as “not an excessively difficult or unpleasant place to operate.”

Dismissing his previously stated warning about actions that could lead to a major ground war in Asia, Taylor wrote: “The risks of backing into a major Asian war by way of SVN are present but are not impressive.” He supported his argument with two strategic assess-

ments that turned out to be completely wrong, but which were widely accepted then and continued to handicap American decision-makers into the late-1960s.

First, North Vietnam was “extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing, a weakness which should be exploited diplomatically in convincing Hanoi to lay off SVN.” A belief in the overwhelming force of American air power was an article of faith among the nation’s political and military leadership. Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay famously said that North Vietnam should be “bombed back to the stone age.” There was a fatal flaw in LeMay’s logic: Industrially and economically, North Vietnam was not that far removed from the Stone Age. There were few worthwhile strategic targets in the country.

From the early days of the Operation Rolling Thunder air campaign (March 1965–November 1968), as the *Pentagon Papers* make clear, most of the U.S. intelligence community believed the bombing was having very little real effect, physically or psychologically, on the North Vietnamese. Yet most political leaders, McNamara foremost among them, continued naively to believe that the North Vietnamese would “get the message” with just a little more pressure.

In Taylor’s second erroneous assessment, he contended that both the North Vietnamese and their Chinese backers would face severe logistical difficulties as they tried to maintain strong forces in the field. American troops faced the same difficulties, Taylor acknowledged, “but by no means to the same degree.” He again reinforced his argument with the air power fallacy: “There is no case for fearing a mass onslaught of Communist manpower into SNV and its neighboring states, particularly if our airpower is allowed a free hand against logistical targets.”

Events, of course, proved otherwise. No matter how

long and hard American aircraft pounded the Ho Chi Minh Trail, men and the materiel flowed, almost without interruption, from the north to south. A typical American division, with its heavy equipment and massive logistical tail, could never endure hundreds of miles of jungle and mountain trails and emerge an effective fighting force. But a mobile and lightly equipped North Vietnamese division, trained to live off the land, was a different beast entirely.

Taylor’s recommendation to send combat troops to Vietnam received wide acceptance among Washington’s senior policymakers, especially McNamara, but there was one key exception: the president himself. Kennedy would not make such a commitment at the time. However, the proposal remained on the table, along with the flawed supporting arguments in Taylor’s cable.

Kennedy eventually tried to resolve the conflicts between Taylor’s ambiguous position as “military representative to the president” and the authority of the Joint Chiefs by making Taylor chairman of the Joint Chiefs in October 1962. That move, however, did little to heal the political-military breach. Taylor intentionally and continually misrepresented the views of the Joint Chiefs to the secretary of defense and kept the other chiefs at a distance from the political decision-making process, according to McMaster.

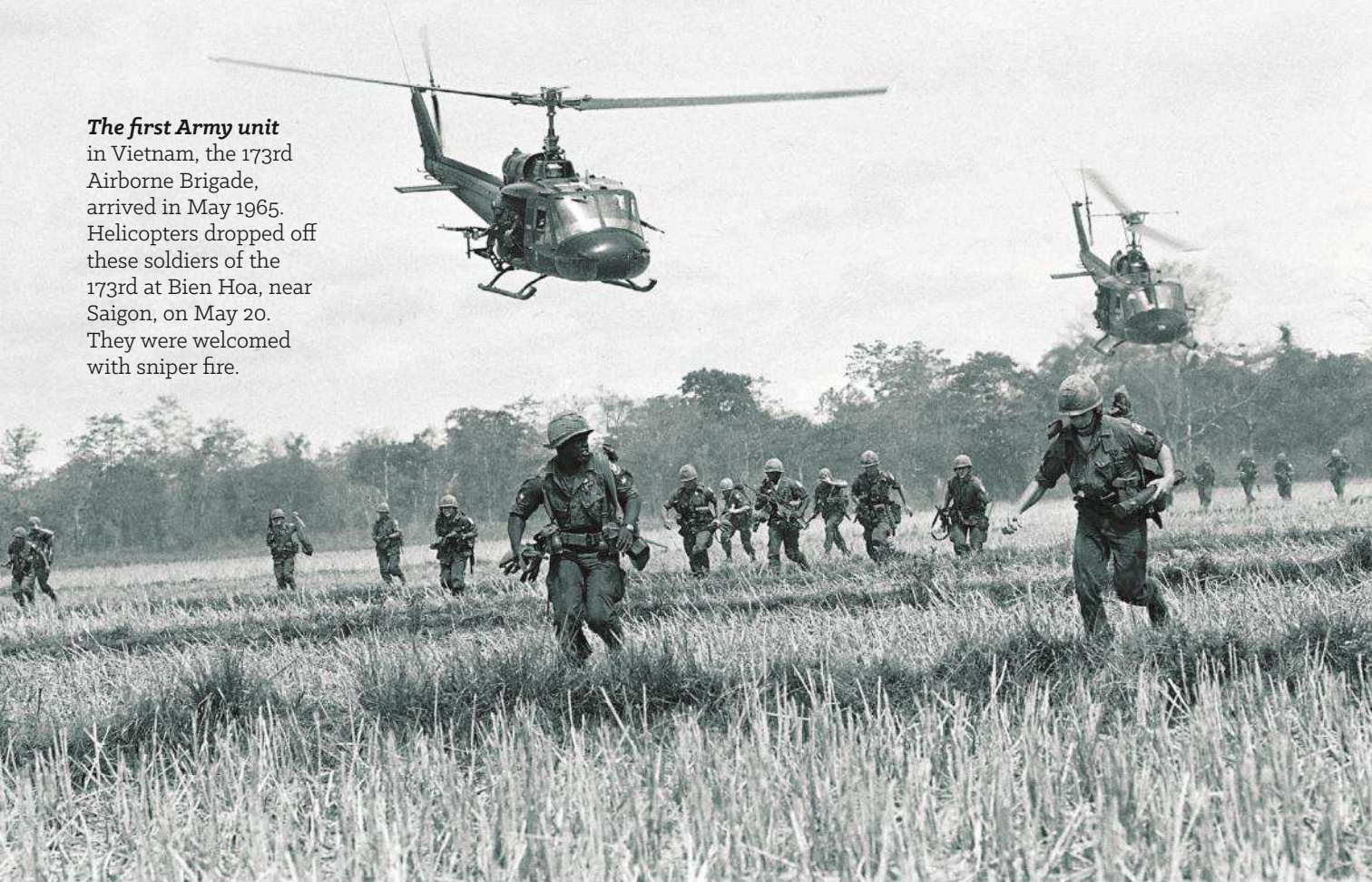
Contrary to the beliefs of the other chiefs—that it was their duty to provide the civilian leadership with objective military advice—Taylor apparently thought his job was to support the secretary of defense’s policy positions, including McNamara’s theories about the incremental escalation of military force. The experience of the four-star general’s entire career should have shown him the fallacy of such a strategy.

To his credit, Taylor did not support the Nov. 2, 1963, coup that resulted in Diem’s assassination. Less than

Taylor’s memo didn’t persuade Kennedy to commit troops to Vietnam, but Johnson sent in 3,500 Marines. The ones who landed at Da Nang on March 8, 1965, were the first American combat troops in the country.



The first Army unit in Vietnam, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, arrived in May 1965. Helicopters dropped off these soldiers of the 173rd at Bien Hoa, near Saigon, on May 20. They were welcomed with sniper fire.



three weeks later, Kennedy fell to an assassin's bullet. Johnson retained virtually all of Kennedy's national security team—as well as the dysfunctional and toxic political-military divide that came with it. But Taylor's credibility with Johnson was so strong that in July 1964 the president sent him to Saigon as U.S. ambassador to manage the growing crisis.

Taylor's recommendation for his successor as chairman was Army Chief of Staff Gen. Earl Wheeler, a talented and experienced staff officer who had almost no combat and little command experience.

Taylor's relationship with the increasingly corrupt and self-serving Saigon government proved rocky at best. First, he supported Gen. Nguyen Khanh's coup against Gen. Duong Van Minh, but then helped engineer the removal of Khanh as prime minister. With each step, America increasingly assumed ownership of the war.

Joining 23,000 American advisers already in Vietnam, the first U.S. ground combat troops, consisting of 3,500 Marines, arrived on March 8, 1965. The underlying logic for their deployment had changed little, except that the internal situation in South Vietnam was now far worse.

That initial force turned out to be exactly what Taylor had described in his 1961 cable: an advance party for follow-on American forces. At the war's peak in 1968, more than 500,000 U.S. troops were in Vietnam.

Johnson and McNamara were convinced that Taylor

would make the perfect senior partner to Gen. William Westmoreland, Taylor's longtime protege who had recently assumed command of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, which oversaw all combat forces in South Vietnam. But the Taylor-Westmoreland "dream team" turned out to be anything but harmonious. Despite his original recommendation to commit combat troops, Taylor retained a limited vision for their role and mission, while Westmoreland advanced a far more aggressive approach that led to the United States taking over responsibility for the war.

However, Taylor, Westmoreland and McNamara all clung to their beliefs that U.S. air power could bomb the North Vietnamese leadership to the negotiating table and that the communist troop and supply lines to the south could be strangled.

By the time Taylor was replaced as ambassador in July 1965, the United States was already beyond the "point of no return" on its slippery slope to a strategic quagmire. Unfortunately, the tragedy had seven more years to run. Today, Westmoreland is castigated as "the general who lost Vietnam." Perhaps that is a more accurate description of Taylor, whom Tom Ricks, in his 2012 book *The Generals*, said was arguably "the most destructive general in American history." ▼

Retired Army Maj. Gen. David T. Zabecki is Vietnam magazine's editor emeritus.

The bare-bone O-1 Bird Dog's good performance at low speeds made it an ideal choice for pilots like Capt. Larry Deibert, opposite page, who looked for enemy locations and directed airstrikes against them.



Catkillers Over Con Thien

Flying low and slow, pilots in Cessna O-1
Bird Dogs hunted down the enemy

By Paul X. Rutz



A

Army Capt. Charles L. “Larry” Deibert’s hardest day in Vietnam ended when he chucked a rat out of his cockpit window. After landing at the Dong Ha base in northern South Vietnam to drop off his back-seater, Marine 1st Lt. John Haaland, Deibert nursed his bullet-riddled O-1 Bird Dog home to Phu Bai Airfield, about 60 miles down the coast, in the early hours of Sept. 11, 1967. The plane’s battle damage had accrued through several hours of intense combat over a beleaguered outpost near the Demilitarized Zone, and now, staring at the lit instruments in front of him over blacked-out South Vietnam, Deibert felt fatigue setting in.

His eyelids grew heavy, and he fought to keep his head from nodding down to rest on the two steel rods connecting the wings above him to the top of the instrument panel. As he blinked, the rat appeared, perched on one of the rods and staring at him. In a flash Deibert grabbed the intruder and flung it outside. His heart racing as he guided the plane to land, the pilot wondered if that rodent—which must have been scrambling around inside the plane through a night of jinking, shuddering and combat noise—was a “friendly” or a North Vietnamese Army rat.

Deibert had begun his yearlong tour on Jan. 15, 1967. He had served two years in the Marine Corps (1956-58), then several years in the National Guard and went to flight school before joining the active-duty Army in January 1966. He came to Vietnam an old man—at age 31. Other pilots called him “pops” or “Captain Hair” for the thick dark shock atop his head.

Deibert helped lead the 220th Reconnaissance Airplane Company, a group of Army pilots and Marine aerial observers who directed close-air and artillery support for the Marines in I Corps, the military designation for South Vietnam’s northernmost provinces. He was known by the call sign Catkiller 4-6. The numerals indicated that he was 4th Platoon’s commander. “Cat” was shorthand for tiger and slang for the NVA.

The Catkillers had more in common with World War I biplane pilots than with those flying the “fast-mover” jets they directed toward ground targets. Their prop-driven Cessna O-1 Bird Dogs cruised at about 100 mph, often only a few hundred feet over the heads of NVA anti-aircraft gunners. Bird Dog pilots constantly changed direction and altitude, flying with crossed controls—rudder pedals pushed one way and the aileron stick held the opposite way—to keep the noses of their aircraft aimed a few degrees to the right or left of their actual heading, making it harder for NVA gunners to predict where the planes would be moments after they pulled the trigger.

Pilots like Deibert, called forward air controllers, were crucial links between ground troops and other aircraft that supported them. They flew above thick jungles and mountain highlands, watching enemy movements, establishing radio contact with ground units and circling overhead while directing artillery shelling, airstrikes by jets and medevac operations. Bird Dog crews knew the needs and capabilities of the grunts who called on them at all hours and in all types of weather, including monsoon rains, high winds and pitch-black nights. They typically logged more flight time in three months than

fighter pilots did in a whole one-year tour.

The Bird Dog's main weapons were four wing-mounted 2.75-inch-diameter rockets that shot out a bright white phosphorous smoke cloud to clearly mark enemy targets for bomb-laden jets arriving on scene. The rockets had explosive power similar to a 105 mm howitzer shell, and the phosphorus would stick to whatever it contacted, including bodies, which could be severely burned.

Deibert and his back-seater usually augmented their meager defenses with 5.56 mm CAR-15 assault rifles (an AR-15 with a collapsible stock), .45-caliber M1911A1 pistols, World War II-vintage M3 "grease gun" submachine guns and hand grenades. They used those weapons against North Vietnamese ground troops while turning the plane in a tight bank. When shooting their rifles, they held them outside the cockpit to keep the hot brass casings from falling inside the plane and potentially jamming the controls.

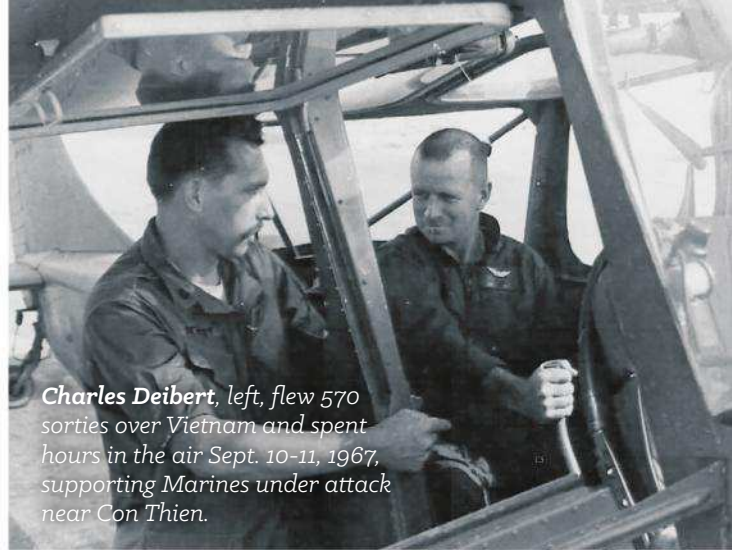
The O-1 Bird Dog (also known as the L-19) was designed for maneuverability and combat-zone reliability. In 1947, soon after the Pentagon reassigned most of the Army's planes to the newly created U.S. Air Force, the Army asked aircraft manufacturers to compete for a contract to build a two-seat, all-metal plane for artillery spotting and observation.

Cessna used its reliable 170 model as a starting point, changing the pilot and co-pilot configuration from side-by-side seating to an arrangement that put the pilot in the front seat and co-pilot in the back. The company beefed up the engine but otherwise stuck with the 170's simple design, including the fixed landing gear. Cessna tested the first military variant, called the 305, in December 1949 and won the contract, with rollout set for late 1950. A naming contest within the company was won by industrial photographer Jack A. Swayze, who suggested "Bird Dog," a nod to the plane's anticipated role in spotting the hunters' quarry and then calling in overwhelming firepower. The O-1 first saw combat in the Korean War, and 3,431 were produced between 1950 and 1959.

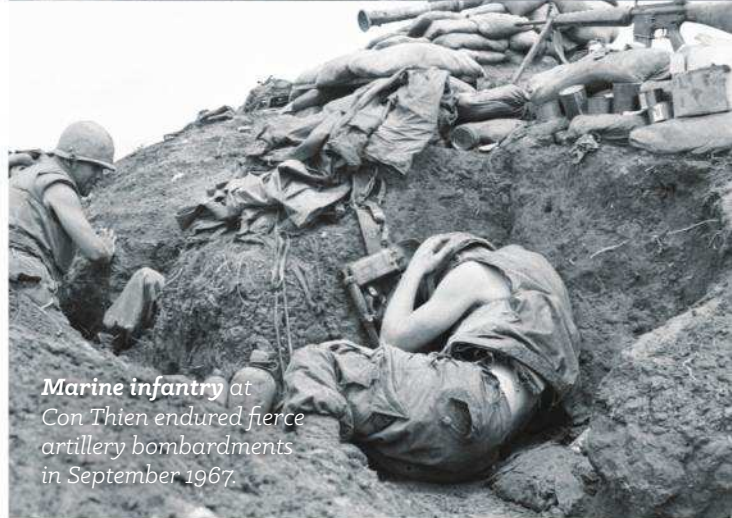
The Army, Air Force and Marine Corps used Bird Dogs in Vietnam early in the war. But by mid-1967 the Air Force's Cessna O-2A Skymaster—a "push-puller" with propellers in the front and back—began replacing the O-1. The last Bird Dog was retired from military service in 1974, although several are still flying in civilian hands today.

Lightweight and able to turn on a dime, the Bird Dog proved ideal for front-line service. Pilots joked about wearing it on their backs instead of controlling it. The high wing allowed for maximum ground visibility, and the plane's superior lift made short field takeoffs and landings a breeze. With extra windows around the cockpit and a reconfigured aft superstructure, crews could see virtually all the way around the aircraft.

The Bird Dog also proved to be exceptionally rugged in combat. Pilots could keep it airborne with multiple bullet holes in the wings, Deibert recalled. "The skin is thin," he said. "A round will go through it and just leave two little holes. You can look like a piece of Swiss cheese, and



Charles Deibert, left, flew 570 sorties over Vietnam and spent hours in the air Sept. 10-11, 1967, supporting Marines under attack near Con Thien.



Marine infantry at Con Thien endured fierce artillery bombardments in September 1967.

it's no big deal unless a bullet hits the pilot or a gas line. It was just an awesome, awesome little airplane."

In mid-1967, after an overwhelming enemy artillery and rocket attack damaged several parked aircraft at Dong Ha, the 220th Reconnaissance company's headquarters moved south to Phu Bai. Bird Dog crews still flew up north, however, with an average of three O-1s operating out of Dong Ha during the day and one overnight. If a Marine unit was hit at night or enemy artillery fired on Dong Ha itself, the on-duty Catkillers would scramble into the air, sometimes without time to call for proper clearance from air traffic control, and look for muzzle flashes.

If the enemy was spotted, the Bird Dog crew would radio for payback in whatever form was available—Army or Marine Corps artillery, rockets from Navy barges just offshore or even shells from the battleship USS *New Jersey* in the South China Sea. Roughly three-quarters of the time, however, the punishment came from airstrikes by carrier-based Navy and Marine F-4 Phantoms, A-4 Skyhawks and A-1 Skyraiders. Air Force jets based in Thailand also made occasional strikes.

On missions over North Vietnam to hunt for artillery or search for downed aircrews, the Catkillers flew in pairs. One Bird Dog would stay low, sometimes just 300 feet above the jungle treetops. The other would fly at an altitude of 2,000 to 5,000 feet and keep the lower plane in sight in case it went down. Deibert flew 73 such mis-

sions, code-named “Banjo,” but most of his 570 sorties took place just south of the DMZ, where Marines were always in trouble.

What Deibert calls “that terrible day” took place at Con Thien, a Marine outpost on a barren 525-foot hill about 2 miles south of the DMZ and 8 miles west of the South Vietnamese coast. The outpost was positioned on the southern edge of an east-west barrier being constructed along the DMZ—from the South China Sea to Laos—to block the flow of NVA troops into South Vietnam. The barrier line was marked by a cleared area about 600 meters (656 yards) wide, where the Pentagon planned to lay down barbed wire, mines and electronic sensors that could detect enemy movements. Promoted by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, it was called McNamara’s Line.

The barrier was never completed, and Con Thien, which means “hill of angels,” became known as the least defensible of any American base because it was so close to North Vietnam and only large enough to house one



reinforced battalion. Since the Marines had arrived there in December 1966, North Vietnamese forces had been regularly probing ground defenses and lobbing artillery at the outpost. Locating and silencing the NVA’s 130 mm guns proved tricky, even with saturation bombing by B-52s, because the weapons were operated by highly mobile units from bases safely situated across the northern border in caves and tunnels. As 1967 wore on, Marines came to hate the hill, which was soon stripped of all vegetation by constant artillery attacks that forced them into mud-filled trenches and bunkers. They tried their best, with patrols and ambushes, to keep the enemy from constructing fortified positions close by. Every 30 days a new battalion would take its place on the hill, which earned nicknames like “the Meat Grinder” and “Our Turn in the Barrel.”

When North Vietnamese commanders looked at Con Thien, they saw shades of Dien Bien Phu, where a seven-week siege in 1954 resulted in a decisive defeat of French forces in a similar situation. The stage was set for a massive test of wills. Capturing Con Thien would open a new supply route to the south, provide a staging ground for an attack on the major American installation at Dong Ha and—in the worried opinions of American military officials—produce a major propaganda victory. Gen. William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in South Vietnam, declared that Con Thien was less a military engagement than a political one. “Their target is American public opinion,” he told reporters in September 1967.

At that time, elements of the 3rd Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment, were patrolling near the Con Thien outpost, and that September would be the deadliest in the unit’s history.

At about 5 p.m. on Sept. 10, 1967, Deibert and Haaland took off from Dong Ha for a mission that was immediately scrapped. Landshark Bravo, the air traffic controller responsible for the I Corps area, ordered their Bird Dog to Con Thien as fast as possible. Flying at 2,000 feet, they raced straight toward an unfolding crisis. An estimated 1,400 North Vietnamese troops, advancing behind a

North Vietnamese commanders saw an opportunity at Con Thien to replicate the 1954 siege of Dien Bien Phu, where they had decisively defeated French forces.



Artillerymen of the 2nd Battalion, 12th Marine Regiment, at Con Thien, shell the North Vietnamese in 1967.



An aerial camera, inset, installed on a Bird Dog assisted pilots on reconnaissance missions.



screen of smoke and tear gas, surged across the DMZ in a coordinated attempt to take Con Thien.

Earlier that day, the NVA had struck I Company of the 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines, while the unit was on a reconnaissance patrol southwest of Con Thien. Outnumbered 6-1, the Marines battled North Vietnamese troops in savage close-quarters fighting but suffered heavy casualties and were driven from their position. As the situation worsened, I Company 1st Lt. R. R. Zappardino radioed his position to Deibert and Haaland, then popped smoke to mark the unit's location and watched the tiny plane fly in. Intense enemy fire prevented helicopters from resupplying the Marines or evacuating the wounded, but Deibert wouldn't be stopped. He flew his Bird Dog overhead to assess the situation, maneuvering in tight, unpredictable turns to avoid the NVA fire.

The plane was pelted with a "heavy volume of .30 caliber, .50 caliber and 37 mm flak aimed at his airplane," according to Haaland's statement after the battle. Three times Zappardino and others on the ground told Deibert to get out of the area. Deibert and Haaland refused to leave the Marines. They stayed in contact with the men below and radioed the locations of visible enemy positions.

In the meantime, Landshark Bravo ordered all aircraft bound for bombing runs on Hanoi to divert to Con Thien and support the Marines. As the first of several fighter-bombers approached the scene, Deibert scribbled all of their call signs and the altitudes of their holding patterns on his windshield in grease pencil. Near that list, dead center on the windshield, was a hand-drawn plus sign that served as an improvised gunsight. If Deibert sat square in his seat, the plus sign was right in front of his eye, and he could use it to aim his four white phosphorus smoke rockets when he fired them at ground targets.

After spying three enemy anti-aircraft gun positions close together, Deibert armed one of his rockets, aimed and dove on his target for a split second, pressed the trig-

ger and immediately went back to evasive maneuvers. Normally, a Bird Dog pilot would fire toward his target, see where the rocket hit and then radio an aiming adjustment to the jets to guide their bomb drops (directing them, for example, to a spot 50 meters west of the smoke).

But Deibert's rocket went exactly

where it was aimed, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy gun crews. The Bird Dog pilot told a pair of A-4 Skyhawks to hit his smoke, and the jets took turns finishing the job while the Bird Dog found another target.

"We had aircraft on station holding in circles every thousand feet" waiting in turn to drop ordnance and head home, recalled Deibert, who said he and Haaland were like two conductors leading a massive symphony. Haaland had "all three radios going on his frequencies," Deibert said, "and I had all three radios going on the ones that I was using. It was so busy, and it was so loud." Dipping and dodging at altitudes between 400 and 900 feet, Deibert was "slamming the stick, just back and forth and sideways" for seven stomach-churning hours, the pilot said. The occasional loud thud announced an enemy hit on the Bird Dog.

Whenever the plane's nose tipped over into a dive, both men would rise into their harnesses and, for a moment, sand from the floor would float all around them. Then as Deibert pulled back on the stick, their bodies would smash back into their seats.

Eventually Deibert found a route that allowed four Marine Corps UH-34D helicopters to use the hilly terrain as a screen from enemy fire so they could land, deliver ammunition and evacuate the seriously wounded.

As several hundred NVA troops rushed toward a unit of pinned-down Marines, Deibert heard a young radio operator screaming into the mike for help. "I'm thinking, God, he's terrified," Deibert said. He soon realized, however, that in the deafening roar of battle the men had to scream their words. When he was on the radio talking to the Marines, Deibert could hear the "crackling of the ri-

fles and the machine guns” and “hand grenades going off.” During the chaos, an enemy round smashed through the windshield and grazed his face.

Several of the attacking jets circling in holding patterns were running out of fuel. Landshark Bravo sent another Bird Dog to join the fight. That plane flew to an area about a mile west of Deibert. Its pilot directed jets that flew northbound on a bombing run, then made a left-hand turn away from the battle below and circled back for additional strikes, while Deibert, to the east of Con Thien, put his jets on the same northbound approach, with a turn to the right before circling back to the attack site. The jets scored direct hits on an NVA ammo dump, creating dozens of secondary explosions and a fire that burned for nine hours.

Low on fuel, Deibert and Haaland had to return to Dong Ha. During the refueling, they got out of the plane for about eight minutes to help the crew chief rearm it with four rockets. Back in the air, they remained above the besieged battalion into the early morning hours.

Around 2 a.m. on Sept. 11, Catkiller 4-6 finally left the area. Deibert landed at Dong Ha to drop off Haaland and then threw the troublesome rat out the window. Deibert and a new back-seater returned to the scene in an undamaged Bird Dog later that day but had no further contact with enemy troops. “They had all blended into the jungle, and the good guys were around picking up Americans.” Deibert said. It looked like the enemy had dragged its casualties away using meat hooks, he added.

The NVA continued to pound the hill at Con Thien for the rest of September. Toward the end of the year the fighting died down as the NVA regrouped and launched an attack in January 1968 on the Khe Sanh Marine base, which remained under siege until early April when soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) arrived.

For his heroics over Con Thien, Deibert was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Army’s second-highest combat honor. Haaland received the Silver Star, the third-highest valor medal. During the battle at Con Thien, 38 Marines were killed and 192 wounded. Approximately 150 Americans on the ground got through the battle unhurt. The NVA suffered 241 confirmed dead, with an additional 450 probable. Deibert received credit for 88 confirmed and 150 probable kills. The ground crew counted 23 bullet holes in his Bird Dog.

In many ways, directing the airborne counterattack at Con Thien was the most notable of Deibert’s Bird Dog exploits, but it was only one day in a year flying unarmed Cessnas over extremely dangerous real estate. Bullet holes were punched in other Bird Dogs he flew, although Sept. 10 made up



Rockets were used by Bird Dog pilots to mark enemy targets for fast-moving attack aircraft.

about half of his total from groundfire in 1967. Deibert also had to make three forced landings near the DMZ that year, and he radioed a 10-minute emergency piloting lesson to a Bird Dog back-seater whose pilot was shot in the head, leading to a messy—but successful—landing.

For troops in trouble, an approaching Bird Dog was a comforting sound, a sign that close air support, resupply or evacuation would soon follow. The 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines, made Deibert an honorary member of their unit after the war, hanging his DSC next to the 11 Navy Crosses and one Medal of Honor they received in-country and embracing him every year at their reunion. ▼

Paul X. Rutz, a former Navy lieutenant, is a portrait painter and freelance writer.



In recognition of Deibert’s heroism at Con Thien, Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Donald Anderson presents the Distinguished Service Cross to the captain at Camp Rilea, Oregon, on July 20, 1968.



GUNS OF THE GRUNTS

Infantry troops in Vietnam carried powerful new weapons into combat

By Jon Guttman

D

espite the massive artillery and air firepower the United States deployed in its attacks on communist forces in Vietnam, most gunfights came down to infantry weapons used at often terrifyingly close quarters. Automatic weapons had increased the carnage of war since the early 20th century, but in Vietnam a proliferation of M16 assault rifles put rapid-fire guns in the hands of every grunt, whether he was fighting in a carefully prepared ambush or a chance encounter. The U.S. infantryman's arsenal included a dazzling array of lethal devices: machine guns, grenade launchers, advanced versions of World War II bazookas, small mortars and remotely detonated land mines. Allies sometimes had their own versions of those weapons. The Australians, for example, carried the semi-automatic L1A1 Self-Loading Rifle (SLR, or as many called it, "stupidly long rifle") and sometimes the F1 submachine gun. The North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong came to the battlefield with weapons such as Soviet AK-47 assault rifles, light machine guns and wooden-handle grenades. The Viet Cong also used whatever they could smuggle or improvise, including Thompson submachine guns, homemade firearms not far removed from matchlock muskets and mortars made from 2-inch pipes with metal strips for legs. ▼



The war's iconic rifle

The M16, first used in Vietnam in 1965, initially suffered from reports of jamming and inadequate cleaning kits, but battlefield experience hastened improvements that turned the rifle into a worthy weapon—provided it was kept clean. The Starlight Scope, introduced in an early form in 1965 and improved in 1967, gave this soldier, shown with his M16 in January 1967, the ability to spot enemy troops at night. A shorter variant of the M16, the XM-177E2, displayed at left by a rifleman in the 1st Cavalry Division in October 1967, led to the M4 carbine.



TOP: AP PHOTO/JOHNER. INSET: BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

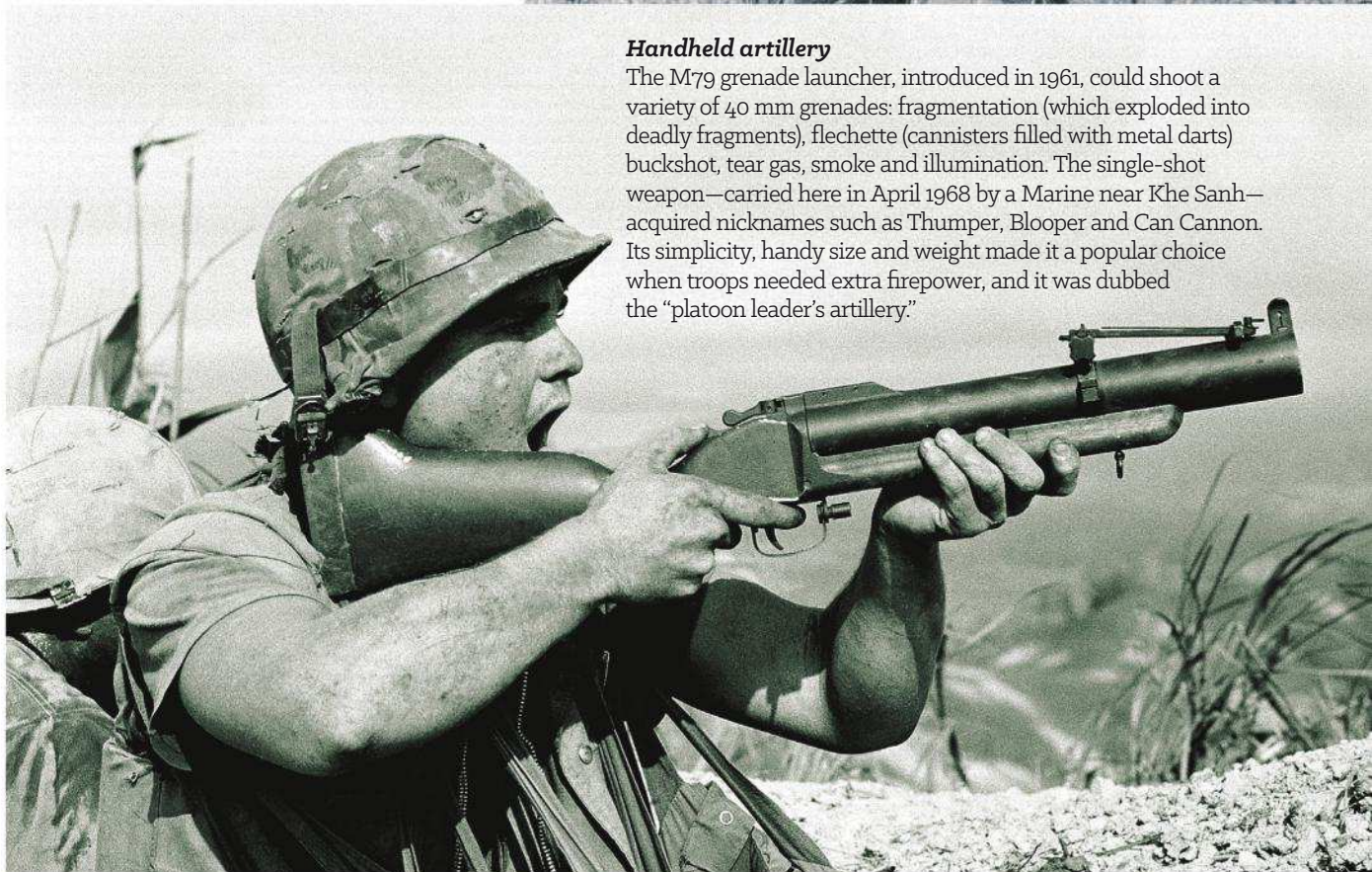
The Pig

Derived from the German MG42 of World War II, the M60 was the standard platoon machine gun in Vietnam, replacing the M1919A6 Browning .30-caliber machine gun. Ideally served by three crewmen, the machine gun's bulkiness and weight earned it the moniker "Pig." The 7.62 mm M60 could be fired from the shoulder or mounted on a vehicle, helicopter or riverboat. The M60's superior range and stopping power has kept it in service to this day, although it is now complemented by the lighter 5.56 mm M249 squad machine gun.



Handheld artillery

The M79 grenade launcher, introduced in 1961, could shoot a variety of 40 mm grenades: fragmentation (which exploded into deadly fragments), flechette (cannisters filled with metal darts) buckshot, tear gas, smoke and illumination. The single-shot weapon—carried here in April 1968 by a Marine near Khe Sanh—acquired nicknames such as Thumper, Blooper and Can Cannon. Its simplicity, handy size and weight made it a popular choice when troops needed extra firepower, and it was dubbed the "platoon leader's artillery."





Laying down the LAW

Beginning in 1963 the M72 LAW, short for light anti-armor weapon, gave soldiers and Marines a high-explosive rocket that could knock out tanks. But the M72, shouldered in this photo by a soldier in the 101st Airborne Division in 1966, was also able to penetrate up to 2 feet of concrete or 6 feet of soil and was used to destroy enemy bunkers more often than it was fired at tanks. However, its sensitive electrical system could succumb to corrosion or other ailments. In April 1972, South Vietnamese troops used LAWs to great effect against enemy T-54 and PT-76 tanks during urban battles.



Evolution of a sword

The designer of the M18A1 mine nicknamed it after a historic Scottish broadsword capable of sweeping away all who lay before it: the Claymore. Unlike most mines, the Claymore was installed above ground on two metal scissor legs and detonated remotely through a connected wire. It sprayed metal balls in a 60-degree arc as far as 300 feet. From its arrival in Vietnam in 1966, the Claymore was used by Americans—and Australians like the one at right—to set up ambushes in the Vietnamese foliage.

TOP: GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: AP PHOTO/SCHNEIDER; OPPOSITE TOP: GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: © AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL



Stovepipe guys

While most of the artillery that supported men in the field was fired from a distance, some types of mortars were hauled into the jungle by troops on foot. A common one was the 60 mm M19 mortar derived from the British Stokes mortar of World War I. Americans got an extra punch from another mortar, the 81 mm M29, illustrated above by a crew from the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, near the Demilitarized Zone in October 1966.



Rocket men

Famous for defeating T-34/85 tanks in Korea, the M20 “Super Bazooka” found virtually no tanks to fight in Vietnam. However, its 3.5-inch rockets were good at blowing holes in enemy fortifications. At left, a member of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, holds a launcher and rocket above a swollen creek near the DMZ in October 1966. For U.S. forces, the M20 gave way to the M72 LAW and the M67 recoilless rifle early in the war.

TOP: AP PHOTO (2); BOTTOM: AP PHOTO/MERRON; OPPOSITE, TOP: AP PHOTO/NORTH VIETNAMESE NEWS AGENCY; BOTTOM: AP PHOTO

Simple but deadly

This photo of a March 1966 North Vietnamese Army training exercise shows the NVA's primary infantry weapons: in the background, the 7.62 mm AK-47, renowned for its reliability even in adverse conditions; in foreground, the 7.62 mm Degtyaryov RPD squad machine gun, lighter than the M60 but lacking the ability to change barrels when it overheated. The NVA and Viet Cong frequently used bamboo launchers for 122 mm rockets, like these found east of Saigon by a U.S. 1st Infantry Division patrol in March 1969.





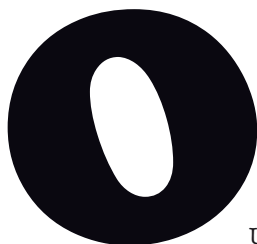
The Bronze Star, which can be awarded for meritorious service outside of combat, is adorned with a V device when the recipient performed an act of valor in combat.

Stealing Valor

An Army clerk discovered a plot to claim undeserved medals and then saw the bravery of another soldier go unrewarded

By Francis Hamit

*The Medal of Honor. The Army's Distinguished Service Cross, the Air Force Cross and the Navy Cross. The Silver Star. The Bronze Star with a "V" device signifying an act of valor. Those pieces of metal and colored ribbons are the treasured symbols of combat heroism in the armed forces of the United States. Only a small number of Americans have demonstrated the battlefield gallantry that merits one of those coveted medals. The rareness and prestige of valor awards, however, have been temptations for a few unscrupulous individuals willing to trade their personal honor for an undeserved medal. In *Out of Step: A Soldier's Memoir of the Vietnam War Years*, Francis Hamit writes about a group of soldiers who "sullied themselves" in a scheme to get awards they did not deserve—and the real heroism of one young GI who didn't get an award that Hamit feels he justly earned.*



One of the "dirty little secrets" about the Vietnam War is that most of the 2.5 million U.S. troops who served

in-country actually had it pretty good.

In a modern army, with its large train of support troops, nine out of 10 military personnel technically "in the field" are not exposed to the dangers of front-line combat. Although any place in the field can be considered a dangerous environment where a single mistake might end in someone's death, most American troops in Vietnam enjoyed hot food, comfortable barracks, showers on most days, and even maid service. They worked in buildings. There were movies to watch at night, frequent beer busts and access to post or base exchanges much like stores in the States.

Troops assigned to units in the rear would seldom get the chance to be legitimate war heroes. Most were fine with that,

happy to complete their one-year tour and go home. But for those raised in a culture that glorified combat and the heroic deeds of World War II and Korea, the lack of opportunity to prove themselves on the battlefield was a quiet frustration.

I came from an Army family and had completed more than three years at the University of Iowa when I joined the Army Security Agency in 1967. The ASA was an intelligence agency that intercepted and deciphered enemy communications. Officially, the ASA

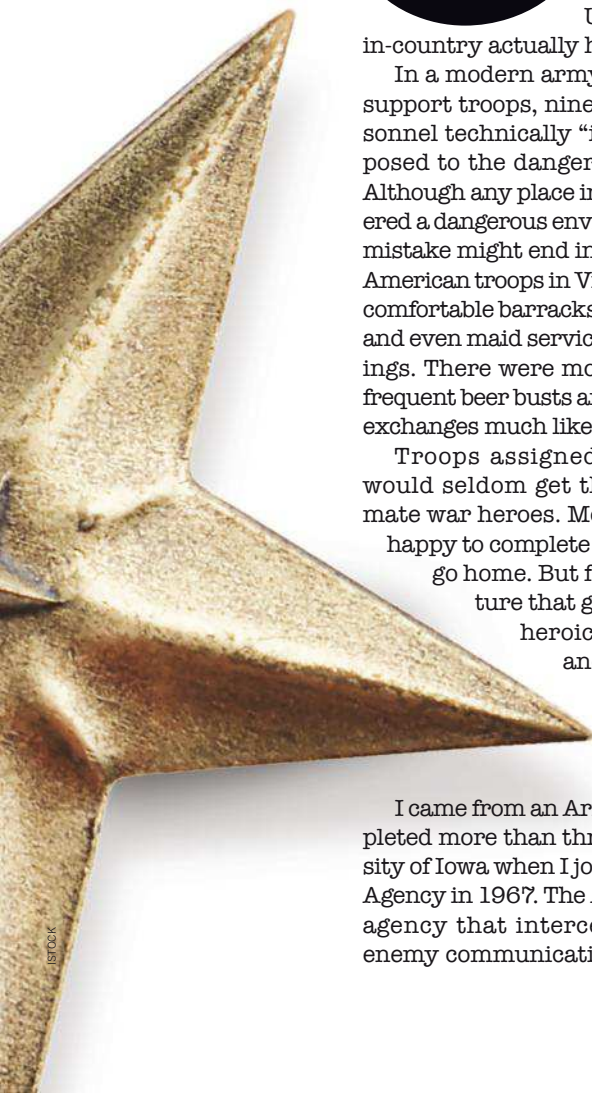
was not "in Vietnam," but it actually was there—operating covertly as Radio Research Units positioned throughout South Vietnam, typically in remote field stations.

After I washed out of the school for radio intercept operators, I volunteered to go to Vietnam as a clerk—at least I could type. I was stationed at Can Tho Army Airfield in the Mekong Delta and assigned to the 156th Aviation Company (Radio Research), which used technology loaded on aircraft to locate the source of enemy radio transmissions.

I arrived at the base as a private first class in March 1968, just after the ferocious fighting of the communist Tet Offensive, launched on Jan. 31 throughout South Vietnam, had largely subsided.

The 156th, one of four companies in the 224th Aviation Battalion (Radio Research), was a hybrid unit, combining ASA members with other soldiers who handled our base's supply, motor pool and aircraft maintenance functions. The Army pilot and co-pilot flying the unit's RU-6 Beavers—"low and slow" single-engine Canadian "bush" aircraft—were not ASA members, but the third crew member, who operated the equipment used to detect enemy radio signals, was an ASA man. ASA soldiers also staffed a military police platoon and served as the company's clerks.

One of my jobs was to make sure that the pilots and radio-intercept operators received Air Medals, one for every 20 hours in the air on combat missions. We had five or six aircraft flying every day, and almost everyone on flight status earned those decorations





Crews at Can Tho Army Airfield flew in RU-6 Beavers, equipped to detect enemy radio signals.

individual record for our unit was the 53 Air Medals that a crewman earned in one year.

I also processed our unit's other awards and decorations. I wrote an official recommendation based on affidavits supporting the soldier's combat actions, took it to the officer in charge for his signature and then sent the recommendation up the chain of command. The paperwork would be closely examined, primarily to ensure the recommended medal was appropriate for the specific action, but also to look for signs of fraud. Commanders with approval authority for specific awards could accept a recommendation, reject it or downgrade it to a lesser award.

An RU-6 Beaver sits on the tarmac at the Can Tho airfield, used by the 156th Aviation Company.



weekly. There were so many flights that subsequent Air Medals were represented not by the oak leaf clusters normally pinned to the original ribbon, but rather with little brass numerals. The

We received informational copies of Medal of Honor citations

awarded to the troops in Vietnam so they could be posted on bulletin boards for inspiration. I read them, but knew I would not be writing any recommendations for that lofty award. The Army did its best to keep us away from the action because our highly specialized skills and Top Secret/Crypto security clearances made us hard to replace. We were expected to avoid activities that would draw unwanted attention and essentially "hide in plain sight."

My best friend at the 156th Aviation Company was Spc. 4 Bill, a skinny 19-year-old military policeman from Tennessee whose family had a history of military service going back to the Civil War. Bill—I lost track of him after he was transferred and don't remember his last name—would show up at guard duty formation with his M1911A1 .45-caliber pistol, M16 rifle, several edged weapons, a few grenades, a 12-gauge shotgun and an old M2 carbine he had acquired on the black market because it was being phased out by the Army.

Bill's fellow MPs teased him about his mass of weaponry, and he also got an earful from the unit's senior noncommissioned officers who were not in the ASA. Ironically, those same sergeants had given Bill a rationale for his heavy armament. They had been exaggerating the impact of the Tet Offensive. Although the Viet Cong attacked the airfield and destroyed parts of Can Tho, the senior NCOs' war stories sounded more like the Battle of the Alamo. They regularly yelled at our perimeter guards, warning them that the VC were "still out there" and "more powerful than ever." Bill knew that Tet had come as a surprise to many and wanted to be ready. So he remained quietly defiant.

When I reached the 156th, the person who had managed the awards detail was long gone. In addition to numerous Air Medal forms to be processed, there was a stack of combat award nominations for the defense of the airfield. They included Silver Star and Bronze Star medals, a Distinguished Service Cross and Army Commendation medals with "V" devices.

Those recommendations, supposedly written by my



Air Medals, awarded for every 20 hours flown on combat missions, were in abundance at Can Tho, where crews flew so often that many earned one practically every week.

predecessor, were all correctly typed and carefully documented, with the required affidavits attached. One of the soldiers recommended for an award harassed me for not having sent the paperwork to headquarters for the signature of the officer in charge.

That prompted me to read the affidavits again. I noticed that a soldier recommended for one award would be supported by those recommended for other awards. All the men mentioned were career NCOs who had come to the unit from the regular Army. The whole thing stank of unethical collusion, but as a newbie and a private I didn't have the authority to decline an award submission.

The officer in charge, a captain, was a pilot who hated paperwork and grumbled when I asked him to read each recommendation before signing it. But I insisted that he read the recommendations closely. The captain grumbled some more, like a kid wanting to go out and play rather than do his homework, but then got wise to my pleadings.

"What's going on, Hamit?" he asked. "I know you. You're up to something."

"Please, sir, just read them. Think of it as a field problem." He did, becoming more and more interested. He got to the bottom of the pile, and asked, "Hamit, where are the Purple Hearts?"

Even though the documents contained language such as "despite his wounds, he continued to advance," there was not a single Purple Heart form. The captain's face flushed as he realized that he had been reading fiction.

I had checked around and learned that the events described in the recommendations never happened. None of the phony recommendations were for our MPs, who were actually defending ASA's part of the perimeter and would have been engaged had there been a fight. The sergeants recommending each other for awards had been back at the barracks as a reserve force.

The main Viet Cong attack during Tet had been perpetrated by the local VC cadre who rounded up some teenage boys, forced obsolete Chinese SKS carbines into their hands and drove them into the meat grinder of our machine guns and remotely detonated Claymore mines, although they did briefly occupy part of the base.

Additionally, a jeep of six VC wearing South Vietnamese uniforms had carried out a diversionary attack on the airfield. They entered through the front gate and simply rode up and down the runway and aircraft parking areas, creating as much chaos and damage as they could with small arms, grenades and other hand-thrown explosives. They then left through the front gate, before any American force could be formed and sent after them.

I was disgusted that NCOs seeking combat valor



The Distinguished Service Cross is the Army's second-highest award after the Medal of Honor. The Silver Star is third-highest.

awards would sully themselves and the honor of our unit with such a dubious scheme. It would have never worked. Awards for valor go through a careful review process, which starts with a clerk like myself. I think the sergeants wrote and had typed those documents themselves.

Those NCOs were not combat soldiers but rather appeared to be over-age clerks in uniform who had joined after the Korean War on the assumption they could serve a safe 20 years, earn a pension and retire unscathed. They had cooked up this scheme during some drunken evening at their little club, but overlooked one essential detail. A Purple Heart could be initiated only by a medical officer, who would give a wounded soldier a form to pass along to his awards and decorations NCO. No medical form, no Purple Heart.

My captain lifted the entire stack of recommendations, turned in his swivel chair and dumped them all into the gray steel wastebasket next to his desk.

"Hamit," he said, "If any of those 'gentlemen' wish to discuss these awards with me and why they will not be forwarded, I will be happy to enlighten them." He stormed out of the room, cursing a blue streak. Word got around, and none of the NCOs asked for more awards. But the NCO in charge of my unit became hypercritical and started looking for new ways to chew me out.

Later that year my friend Bill, the young, well-armed MP, was assigned to a convoy going to Saigon to pick up supplies. The 156th Aviation Company contributed some big trucks, and guys from the motor pool went along for the adventure, as did a couple of others. Bill went in his usual "battle-rattle" of extra weapons and gear.

A 75-mile trip up to Saigon took about three hours because the highway was torn up in places from war damage. On the return trip, when the trucks were fully loaded with supplies, a local Viet Cong squad sprang a trap, firing on the trucks from the side of the road. The convoy stopped. Bill was riding in the passenger seat of one truck, and the driver was shocked stiff, unable to move.

Bill went into action. He pried the driver's hands off the steering wheel, dragged him under the truck and told him to start firing his weapon at the enemy positions. Then Bill ran up and down the road, helping to organize a defense, as he was trained to do.

Rocket-propelled grenades began to explode among the trucks. The men later described Bill standing at the center of the highway, holding his M16 in one hand and his .45-caliber pistol in the other, directing fire and yelling encouragement to the others. Everyone else fired their weapons, and the Viet Cong broke off their attack and

The Purple Heart
award for combat
wounds requires the
signature of a
medical officer.

withdrew. No one was badly injured, and no vehicles were damaged.

By the time the convoy got back to the airfield, the rest of our guys were pumped up and excited. “Don’t let anyone tell you that combat isn’t a gas!” one of them shouted as they poured into the flight operations building to report. The 156th Aviation’s commanding officer listened and then told them to calm down and unload the trucks.

The driver of Bill’s truck was very quiet, but no one teased him about freezing under fire. Some of the guys had panic attacks during mortar bombardments, including career soldiers in a combat zone for the first time. Panic was something quietly noted, but not discussed. You just hoped that it wouldn’t happen again. Everybody got a pass for it—the first time. And most of us never gave in to it.

As the younger men were shouting and slapping each other on the back as if they had just won an important football game, I shook my head. None of them particularly liked Bill, but they were all talking enthusiastically about how he had led them to victory. They had no idea how lucky they had been. The Viet Cong had not used an L-shaped ambush, which would have caught them in crossfire. Most of the RPGs had fallen well short of the trucks. And the Americans in the fight had a good leader, the skinny 19-year-old they had teased for his “John Wayne” habits.

The next day Bill came to me at my office. “The medical officer gave me this and said I had to turn it in to you,” he stated, handing me the form.

“Bill, this means you get a Purple Heart,” I said. He was very surprised. “You’re kidding! For this? It’s a scratch! He took it out with a pair of tweezers. They covered it with a Band-Aid.” Bill unbuttoned his fatigue shirt and showed me the Band-Aid on his sternum, above his diaphragm. It was a minor wound.

I asked, “What was it?”

“A piece of shrapnel.”

“Do you have it?”

Bill dug into his pocket and pulled out a tiny glass bottle. Inside it was a wicked-looking, blackened, jagged piece of steel about three-fourths of an inch long.

“Hey, no big deal, right?”

I felt very solemn. I told Bill he should submit the award nomination. He had earned it, and if we didn’t forward it up the chain of command, it would look as though we had tried to deny Bill something he had earned. The Purple Heart would also help him with benefits from the Veterans Administration after he got out of the Army and give him points for a government job. But there was

another, more important reason.

“That scratch is right over your aorta,” I explained. If the shrapnel had gone 3 inches deeper, he would have bled out and died in less than five minutes.

Bill stared at me for a long time and turned pale as that sunk in. He sat down hard in the chair next to my desk, suddenly short of breath, his eyes wide.

Until that moment the fact that he might actually die in Vietnam hadn’t made much of an impression. He got up and bolted out of the room. That night, for the first time in his life, he got very drunk.

But Bill recovered and appeared for the next guard duty, still hauling his usual extra gear. But he was a more sober, less enthusiastic warrior from that day forward.

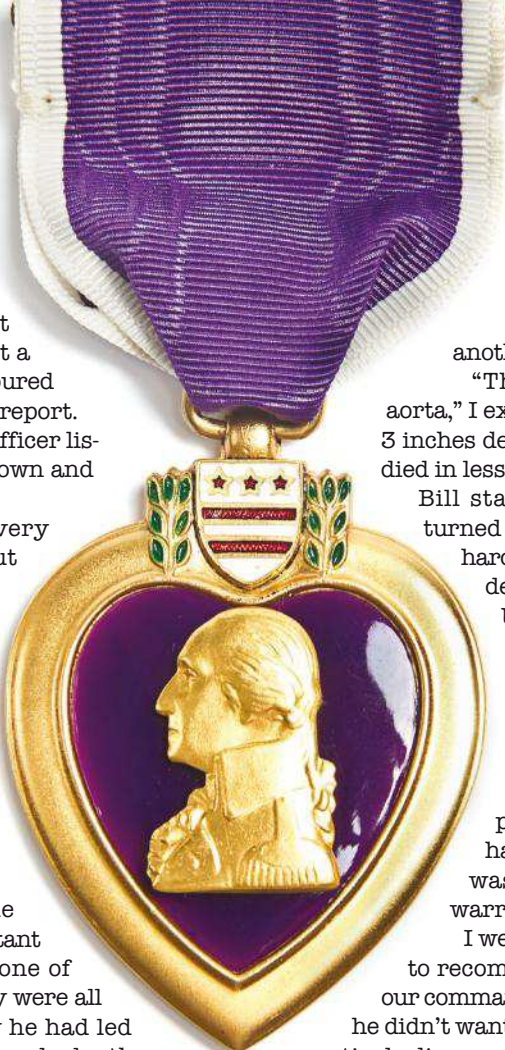
I went around trying to get affidavits to recommend him for a Bronze Star, but our commanding officer put the word out that he didn’t want Bill nominated for the award. He actively discouraged awards of any kind, and without his endorsement, there was no chance the medal would be approved. Bill didn’t think he had done anything special, so he didn’t care.

I did the paperwork for his Purple Heart, however, and walked it to the CO’s office. He wrinkled his nose as if he smelled something bad, but I said, very quietly, “The other copy of the medical officer’s form is out there somewhere, and if this is not signed and forwarded, it will make us look bad.” He reached over and signed the form.

Bill’s Purple Heart arrived about a month later. The following week he was transferred to a new Radio Research base at Long Thanh North, close to Saigon.

His was the only Purple Heart awarded in the 156th Aviation Company the entire year I was there. ASA wasn’t supposed to bleed. Perhaps that’s why Bill was transferred—for setting a bad example. In fact, we had ASA soldiers in other units who received not just Purple Hearts but awards for valor up to and including the Silver Star. They didn’t plan on that, but sometimes it just turns out that way. ▼

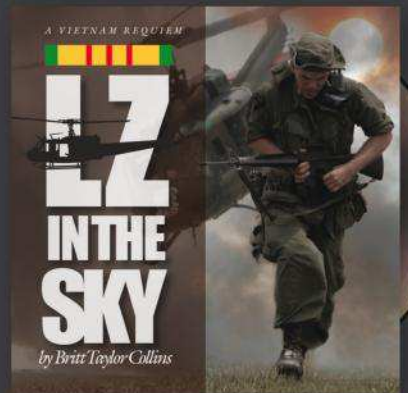
This article is adapted from Out of Step: A Soldier’s Memoir of the Vietnam War Years, by Francis Hamit. A graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop, he is an author of nonfiction books, a film producer, screenwriter and novelist. Part of his memoir, about his time as undercover anti-narcotics operative in Iowa City before he went to Vietnam, is available as “The Perfect Spy.”



AMERICA'S PREMIER MAN CAVE OUTFITTERS

Whoever Said Old Soldiers Just Fade Away Didn't Know Vietnam Veterans.

When Vietnam Veterans pass into eternity they don't just fade away, they depart with sound and fury! And they leave a huge hole in the heart of the Vietnam Community. The fine art print, "The Offering" by military artist Britt Taylor Collins is a farewell tribute to a Vietnam Veteran. Proudly displaying the American flag to a passing formation of Hueys, the old soldier never suspects they are angels on a mission to escort him home.



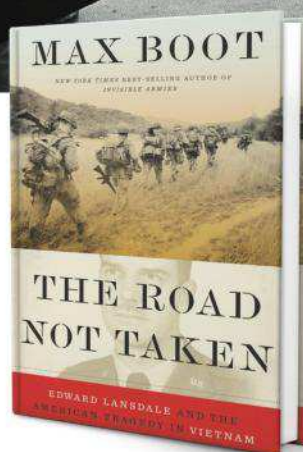
Britt Taylor Collins has written "LZ in the Sky" to tell the story of "The Offering." This song is fast becoming a tradition at Veterans events and memorials. Performed by recording artist, Todd Childers, "LZ in the Sky" is now available for \$10.00. Visit bootsonthegroundART.com

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The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam
By Max Boot,
Liveright, 2018

Edward Lansdale, center, who worked with the CIA in Saigon from 1954 to '56, returned on Aug. 29, 1965, as a special assistant to U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge.

CIA MAN THOUGHT HE HAD WINNING FORMULA

Could Ed Lansdale have won the Vietnam War if U.S. leaders had just listened to him and followed his advice? That's the intriguing question that Max Boot's nearly 800-page biography raises about one of the war's most controversial and fascinating figures. And that question seems genuine—not publicity-hyping hyperbole.

Lansdale, an Air Force colonel attached to the CIA, arrived in Saigon in 1954 as a burgeoning communist insurgency was spreading throughout South Vietnam while the defeated French colonial regime was packing up to leave.

He had already been instrumental in engineering the defeat of another Asian communist guerrilla insurgency, the Philippines' Hukbalahap movement.

During assignments in Manila in 1945-48 and 1951-53, Lansdale—a former civilian advertising executive and self-taught counterinsurgency strategist—managed (nearly single-handedly, according to Boot) to persuade the Philippines' leadership to institute sweeping reforms that robbed the Huk insurgency of Filipino peasants' support while simultaneously strengthening

government control of the population.

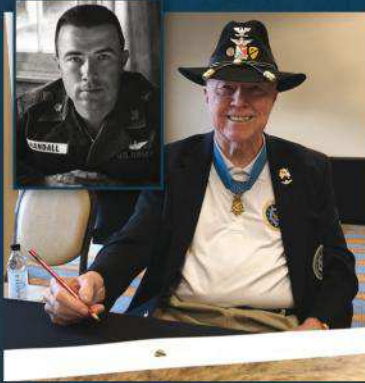
Key to Lansdale's success in instituting and promoting that anti-Huk campaign was his ability to forge close personal relationships with senior Filipino leaders, notably defense minister and later president Ramon Magsaysay (for whose 1953 presidential campaign and victory, Boot claims, Lansdale fully deserves credit).

But all insurgencies are not the same, and Vietnam in 1954 was not the Philippines in 1951. As he did with Magsaysay, Lansdale developed a personal bond with South Vietnam's leader, Ngo Dinh Diem, but he lacked the intimate, personal knowledge of Vietnamese culture, history, geography and politics—the type of background he had gained in the Philippines from many years there (and, not incidentally, through a long relationship with his Filipina paramour, Pat Kelly, who was not merely Lansdale's lover but also his partner in the Philippines' counterinsurgency efforts).

Despite Lansdale's superb skill in building trust and mutual respect with Filipino and Vietnamese leaders, he managed to antagonize nearly everyone

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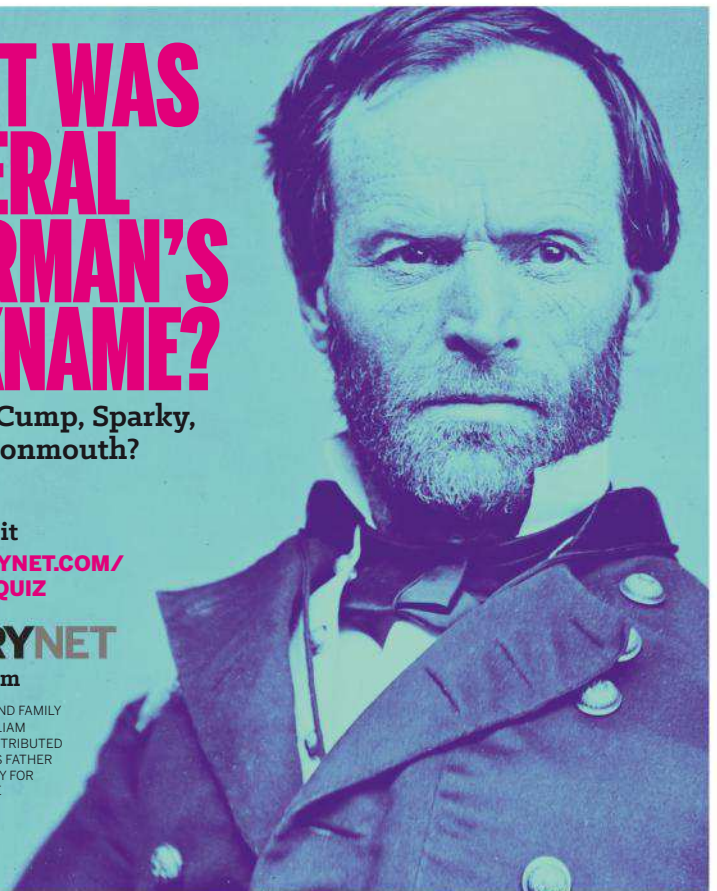
WHAT WAS GENERAL SHERMAN'S NICKNAME?

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ANSWER: HIS FRIENDS AND FAMILY CALLED HIM 'CUMP'. WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN ATTRIBUTED HIS MIDDLE NAME TO HIS FATHER HAVING 'CAUGHT A FANCY FOR THE GREAT CHIEF OF THE SHAWNEES, TECUMSEH'.



he encountered in the U.S. government, including his own superiors in the military, CIA, State Department and other agencies. Lansdale may have been a true visionary in counterinsurgency campaigns, but he proved to be woefully inept in his attempts to cultivate high-level support for his groundbreaking strategy.

Lansdale rightfully deserves credit for recognizing Diem as the only South Vietnamese leader capable of rallying strong popular support for the nascent democracy's central government as it battled the Hanoi-directed communist insurgency. Indeed, Lansdale's support enabled Diem to survive several coup attempts during the 1950s and early '60s. But Lansdale was tragically unable to prevent his own government from engineering the 1963 coup in which Diem was assassinated.

However, the central question remains: Could Lansdale's roadmap for victory, with its emphasis on counterinsurgency campaigns, have led to a better result in Vietnam?

The answer is a definite and unequivocal "no." Lansdale's "road not taken" could not have won the war. A "yes" answer would be predicated upon the demonstrably false assumption that South Vietnam fell to a communist-led guerrilla insurrection supported by the masses, who rose up and overthrew the Saigon government—Mao Zedong's famous "third phase" of classical guerrilla warfare. That, of course, did not happen.

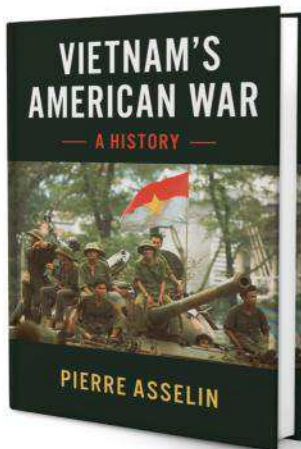
As early as 1966, with the guerrilla movement in South Vietnam faltering, North Vietnam sent men southward to begin replacing its dangerously depleted guerrilla cadres with troops from the regular army. And after the failed 1968 Tet Offensive nearly eradicated the remaining Viet Cong units and revolutionary leaders in the South, the Politburo in Hanoi simply changed its war-fighting strategy—opting to prosecute the war through a naked, overpowering invasion of South Vietnam led by North Vietnamese Army troops.

Although the North would still use guerrilla tactics to avoid the overwhelming firepower of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, Hanoi's military effort was no longer based on classic guerrilla war strategy. There would be no more attempts at a popular uprising to overthrow the Saigon government.

When the communist strategy shifted toward conventional battlefield confrontations, Lansdale's "counterinsurgency" strategy was rendered irrelevant.

The communist attacks in the 1972 Easter Offensive failed miserably in the face of U.S. air power and massive logistical support for South Vietnam. But once the U.S. abandoned the Republic of Vietnam in 1973, Hanoi persevered with that strategy and rolled over the country's defenders in April 1975 with a massive invasion of tanks, artillery and infantry.

—Jerry D. Morelock



Vietnam's American War: A History

By Pierre Asselin,
Cambridge University
Press, 2018

Power Politics in North Vietnam Changed the Direction of the War

Shortly before noon on April 30, 1975, a North Vietnamese tank rumbled through the main gate of the South Vietnamese presidential palace in Saigon, effectively ending the Vietnam War. Stuningly, North Vietnam—despite losing most of the war's battles and suffering disproportionately higher casualties—had outlasted the mighty United States and its South Vietnamese ally.

Just how a small, impoverished nation prevailed over the American "Goliath" is the subject of Pierre Asselin's aptly titled book, *Vietnam's American War*.

Asselin, a professor of history and U.S. foreign relations at San Diego State University, traces the roots of the conflict between North Vietnam and the United States to the 1946-54 First Indochina War, in which Vietnam won its independence from France but was subsequently partitioned at the Geneva peace conference into a communist North and noncommunist South.

The United States, concerned about the threat of communist expansion in Southeast Asia, had supported the French financially and then backed Ngo Dinh Diem, the fiercely anti-communist leader of South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh, portrayed in the book as a wise, temperate and pragmatic leader, feared American intervention in Vietnam and signed the 1954 Geneva accords in part to prevent it. Hanoi, under his cautious stewardship, largely pursued a policy of economic and socialist revolution in the North, not war with the South.

Ho Chi Minh and his fellow "North-firsters" were eventually supplanted by a militant faction led by Party First Secretary Le Duan. Convinced that only armed force could resolve the question of national reunification in Vietnam, Le Duan pushed a resolution through the Politburo in 1963, authorizing what amounted to "all out" war against the South in an attempt to crush the regime in Saigon before

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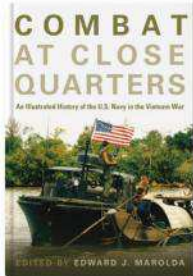
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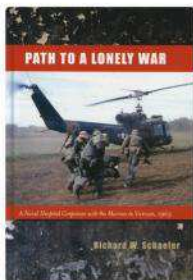
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Combat at Close Quarters: An Illustrated History of the U.S. Navy in the Vietnam War
 Edited by Edward J. Marolda

Covering both the air war and river combat during the conflict, this in-depth volume features more than 200 images from military archives and personal collections. The chapters cover not only the warships and aircraft, but also the men and women who served and fought in Southeast Asia.



Path to a Lonely War: A Naval Hospital Corpsman with the Marines in Vietnam, 1965
 By Richard W. Schaefer

In spring 1965, Navy corpsman Richard Schaefer's unit of Marines was part of the first contingent of American combat forces headed for Vietnam. Schaefer describes in detail his experiences during the early stages of the war and his return to life back home.



Le Duan, first secretary of North Vietnam's Communist Party, speaks on Sept. 9, 1969, at an event honoring Ho Chi Minh, who died Sept. 2.

the United States could intervene militarily. Le Duan's gamble failed when President Lyndon B. Johnson deployed ground combat forces to South Vietnam in March 1965.

Even so, Le Duan and other hardliners in Hanoi—skillfully exploiting a rift between communist superpowers China and the Soviet Union to obtain financial and material support from both—refused to negotiate with Washington, confident that the “American War” would end in victory. The war was waged on multiple fronts. Militarily, communist forces sought to annihilate the South Vietnamese army and bloody the Americans. On the political and diplomatic fronts, Hanoi bolstered the anti-war movement in the U.S. and other countries with propaganda that cast the war as an anti-American, anti-imperialist crusade. That success often served to offset North Vietnam's significant setbacks on the battlefield.

Vietnam's American War recounts the extraordinary toll the war levied on North Vietnamese soldiers and civilians. American bombs devastated the North's already dislocated economy and forced tens of thousands to evacuate into the countryside. By 1967, some 230,000 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers had been killed in the fighting. To maintain morale, communist authorities often withheld casualty information from the families of the deceased.

Frustrated by the stalemate in the South, Le Duan gambled again in January 1968 and launched the Tet Offensive, designed to win the war in a single stroke. Tet was a disaster for communist forces, but the scale of the offensive shocked the American people and undermined their support for the war.

That shift in American public opinion, Asselin asserts, handed Hanoi a strategic victory that obscured the often perilous state of the communist war effort in the critical years following the Tet Offensive.

Asselin, relying on a wealth of Vietnamese language sources, notes that from 1969 to 1972 the North Vietnamese adopted a strategy predicated on political and diplomatic struggle. Hanoi agreed to negotiate, publicly and privately, with Washington to buy enough time to recover from the crippling effects of prolonged combat. Communist propaganda targeting the anti-war movement in the United States continued to play an important role and was used during this period as means to restrain the administration of President Richard Nixon.

Equally intransigent, and determined to achieve “peace with honor,” Nixon used American air power to shatter the communists' 1972 Easter Offensive and bring the North to the brink of destruction by the end of the year. “The bombing proved too much for Le Duan and everyone else in North Vietnam,” writes Asselin. “Le Duan and his regime had a breaking point, and they had reached it.” The peace agreement the two sides brokered in Paris in 1973 ended the “American War”—but it did not ensure the survival of the South Vietnamese state.

Concise, accessible and eminently evenhanded, *Vietnam's American War* shows that the conflict's outcome was not “historical determinism” but rather the “manipulation of contemporary circumstances and shrewd, astute policymaking by Le Duan and his comrades.”

—Warren Wilkins



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MILTON LEE OLIVE III

First black soldier to receive
Medal of Honor in Vietnam

By Doug Sterner

Although President Harry S. Truman's Executive Order 9981 ended segregation in the military in July 1948, Vietnam was the nation's first fully integrated war. Texan Jimmy Stanford, a lieutenant in the 173rd Airborne Brigade, which in May 1965 became the first major Army unit in Vietnam, felt uncomfortable with the desegregation. He had grown up in a segregated town and said the "N-word" occasionally. But he didn't consider himself prejudiced and was thankful for every man in his 3rd Platoon of B Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment.

Stanford's senior platoon sergeant, Vince Yrineo, a 35-year-old Hispanic who had endured racial prejudice, was quick to call his platoon leader out. "I simply wasn't going to take that from some redneck shavetail [second lieutenant], and I wanted him to know right away where I stood," Yrineo recalled years later.

One of Yrineo's soldiers was Milton Lee Olive III, an 18-year-old black Chicagoan everyone usually called

"Skipper." His mother died four hours after he was born on Nov. 7, 1946.

Much of Olive's youth was spent in Chicago with his father and other family members, but he also stayed on his grandparents' farm in Lexington, Mississippi, where he went to an all-black high school that was an extension of a church.

In January 1964, during Olive's second year of high school, the 24th Amendment was ratified, guaranteeing the right to vote without paying poll taxes that had been used to suppress the black vote in the South. Olive became one of the 3,000 students participating in "Mississippi

Freedom Schools," which taught black students about their rights and their potential to bring change at the polls. When the school year ended in 1964, Olive became a volunteer in The Mississippi Summer Project to register black voters.

The escalating violence concerned Olive's grandmother, who sent him back to Chicago. In Chicago, the 17-year-old learned that some of his credits earned in Mississippi didn't count, and he would have to repeat his sophomore year. Discouraged, he left school to find a job, but that didn't pan out either. On his 18th birthday Olive enlisted in the Army. In a letter home he wrote: "You said I was crazy for joining up. Well, I've gone you one better. I'm now an official U.S. Army Paratrooper."

One month after the 173rd Airborne arrived in Vietnam, Pfc. Olive joined the unit there. His cherubic countenance, quiet demeanor and tendency to avoid vulgar language earned a second nickname: "Preacher."

On Oct. 22, 1965, helicopters inserted Olive's unit into dense jungle outside Phu Cuong, near Saigon, where it was engaged by a large enemy force. The Americans returned fire, forcing the enemy into a retreat, and Stanford rallied his men to give chase. But Stanford, Yrineo, Olive and two other soldiers ran into an ambush. "Look out, lieutenant, grenade," Olive shouted, as one landed in the middle of the group. And then the private threw his body over the explosive, giving his life to save four comrades.

"It was the most incredible display of selfless bravery I ever witnessed," Stanford said later.

On April 21, 1966, the elder Milton Olive, who had remarried, and his wife, Antoinette, were at the White House when President Lyndon B. Johnson detailed their son's heroic acts. Stanford looked on as Olive became the first black recipient of the Medal of Honor in the Vietnam War. Stanford "changed drastically after that day [in Vietnam]," Yrineo told me, and said the two men became "very good friends."

"A day doesn't go by that I don't think about him," Stanford said. "Milton Olive changed me. I made a vow never to forget him." ▼

Doug Sterner, an Army veteran who served two tours in Vietnam, is curator of the Military Times Hall of Valor, the largest database of U.S. military valor awards.

Clarksville, Tennessee Welcomes Veterans with 5-Day Celebration

Clarksville, Tennessee appreciates veterans, and they show it in a big way each year with a huge Welcome Home Veterans Celebration.

This year, during September 12-16, the community will host multiple activities to celebrate and honor veterans, with an emphasis on Vietnam veterans.

Clarksville City Councilman and U.S. Air Force Veteran Geno Grubbs was visibly moved after hearing about all of the activities slated for the week. "This is one of the best things our community has ever done to honor veterans," he said.

Activities for the Celebration include:

• **American Traveling Tribute Wall** at Beachaven Vineyards and Winery. This 80-percent scale version of the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, DC spans 360-foot and contains every name that is etched on the original monument. At its apex, the memorial is an impressive eight feet tall.

The Wall will open for public display at noon on September 13, and will remain open 24 hours

a day until 3:00p.m. on September 16.

• **Field of Honor – Veterans Tribute** flag display will also be at Beachaven September 12-16. Part of a nationally recognized community program, the Field of Honor will pay tribute to the strength and unity of Americans, and will honor veterans who served our nation to preserve our security and freedoms.

• **Remembering Our Fallen** photographic war memorial honors our country's military fallen from The War on Terror (9/11/2001 - present). This traveling monument includes both military and personal photos. Its legacy will be that these men and women will be remembered and their names will be spoken.

• **A Wreath Laying and Massing of the Colors** will take place at the Wall on September 13 at 3:30p.m.

• **A Remembrance Ceremony** the evening of September 13 is open to the public and will include music, speakers, and a special time of remembrance.

• **A Valor Luncheon** will be held on September 14 at 11:00am featuring a key note speaker and presentation from Quilts of Valor.

• **Welcome Home Parade** is Saturday, September 15 at 10:00a.m. in historic downtown Clarksville. To participate in the parade, veterans should register at the event's website, welcomehomeveteranscelebration.com.

Plus, enjoy concerts and other activities throughout the week. Keep up to date at welcomehomeveteranscelebration.com.

AARP is the premier sponsor for all event activities. AARP members can receive an 18% discount on all ticketed events with the code WELCOME50.

To participate in any of the activities, or for more information about these or other event, please contact Frances Manzitto by email at frances@visitclarksvilletn.com or call 931-245-4345.

Clarksville, Tennessee's fifth-largest city, is located 40 miles northwest of Nashville on I-24.



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