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SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture

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Burns' Vietnam War *Nghia M. Vo*

EDITOR: If it took Ken Burns and Lynn Novick ten years and 30 million dollars to make this epic 10-episode 18-hour documentary about the Vietnam War, it probably will take a lot of time for each of us to "digest" this encyclopedic work. This work, which as Mr. Burns has suggested, contains interviews from all sides involved in the war, turns out to be one sided as exemplified by the comments below.



<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-vietnam-war/watch/>

Ken Burns and Lynn Novick are to be congratulated for producing this epic 18-hour long documentary that, he suggests, includes all sides involved in the war. However, since the time allocated to each side varies considerably, the documentary looks like a one-sided work. In this essay, we will include a chapter by chapter review followed by a discussion of the documentary.

Ken Burns' Vietnam War

Chapter 1. Déjà Vu: 1858-1961

Failing to take over Da Nang in 1858, 2,000 Franco-Spanish troops turned their sight on Saigon, which they took on February 19, 1859. Leaving a small garrison to control the city, the French joined the British to wage war in China. After they returned to Saigon in 1861, they defeated the besieging Vietnamese at the battle of Ky Hoa and began their conquest of present day South Vietnam. It was only in 1898 that they completed their conquest of Vietnam.

Contrary to what Burns has suggested, local resistance to the French began with Truong Cong Dinh (1859-1864), then the Can Vuong or Monarchist Movement (Phan Dinh Phung, De Tham), the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc or Private School Movement (Phan Chu Trinh), the Dong Du or Pan Asian Movement (Phan Boi Chau), the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (Nguyen Thai Hoc) and the Student's Movement of 1925. It was only after the non-communist nationalist leaders either died (Trinh), were arrested (Chau) or guillotined (Hoc) that the communists slowly emerged from this political struggle by eliminating the remaining non-communist nationalists.

Ho Chi Minh (HCM) left Saigon in 1911 to work on ships as kitchen helper. He visited and worked temporarily in the U.S., Great Britain before settling down in Paris, France from 1919 to 1923. He became so enamored with Lenin that he moved to Moscow in 1923 to study communism following which he was assigned as an agent of Comintern (Communist International) to spread communism in Southeast Asia from southern China (Canton now Guangzhou). A man with at least 100 aliases, he was no communist holy man as conveyed by Burns but was married to at least three women, a Chinese (Tuyet Minh)

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then a Russian, and a Vietnamese (Nguyen Thi Minh Khai). In the latter part of his life, he managed to father a child with a young lady from the Vietnamese highland who worked for him as a nurse. After delivering her baby, she was mysteriously killed in a car accident. After three decades abroad, he returned to Vietnam in 1941 to direct the Viet Minh, a precursor of the communist party of Vietnam (CPV).

The Viet Minh were active in Cochinchina (South Vietnam), which being a French colony enjoyed a relative political freedom compared to central (Annam) and North Vietnam (Tonkin). In 1954, Vietnam was divided into two independent regions through the 17th parallel with the communists occupying the North under Ho Chi Minh; the Republic of South Vietnam in the South was led by Ngo Dinh Diem. After building its infrastructure in the North, what was not stressed in the Burns series was that the CPV, beginning in 1959, decided to send its soldiers to "liberate" the South and to spread communism all over Southeast Asia to fulfill HCM's role as a Comintern member. They initiated the communist land reform (1954-1956)—an adaption of the Chinese Mao land reform—that killed 50-70,000 civilians and were supported by the Chinese and Soviet communists.

Ngo Dinh Diem by trying to build a nation out of the colonial South Vietnam had to fight against the local sects: the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Binh Xuyen, and the French who finally left South Vietnam in 1956. With the help of the Americans, he resettled almost one million northerners who fled the communist North and gave them home, food, and work in the South. He tried to subdue the Buddhists but failed.

Chapter 2: Riding the Tiger: 1961-1963

To fight against the insurgency, President Kennedy helped rebuild the South Vietnamese army and opted for a "limited war" using the Special Forces to pacify the countryside. Diem antagonized the Buddhists causing internal strife.

The U.S. supported a coup that toppled and murdered Diem and his brother Nhu creating an unstable political situation that would last for four years.

Chapter 3: The River Styx: 1964-1965

Profiting from political instability that followed the Diem's murder, the Viet Cong launched widespread attacks on villages destabilizing the security of South Vietnam's countryside.

Johnson increased U.S. commitment to South Vietnam, authorizing bombing of the North and later deployment of troops in the South after Congress passed the Tonkin Resolution.

The battle of Binh Gia was described as pitting a division of VC against two ARVN companies.

Chapter 4. Resolve: 1966-1967.

As the NVA kept sending its troops south, the U.S. was forced to bomb the HCM trail, the vital communist bloodline that kept the war going. As U.S. troops were sent to Vietnam, the antiwar movement that was tame in the beginning began to build up.

In Vietnam, the Buddhists waged another rebellion in Da Nang calling for peace talk with the communists. Nguyen Cao Ky with firm hands put an end to the rebellion.

The poignant story of Denton "Mogie" Crocker who enrolled into the army at the age of 17 only to die eight months after arriving in Vietnam was retold by his family.

U.S. pilots who were shot down in North Vietnam were jailed, mistreated, tortured, and many were kept secluded for years.

Chapter 5. This Is What We Do: June-December 1967.

Unrest in the U.S. in the summer of 1967 unmasked the huge economic and racial gaps between black and white Americans.

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While General Westmoreland relied on his body count as a proof of U.S. progress on the battlefield, in Ha Noi Le Duan in secrecy planned a new and more deadly offensive. And although Westmoreland had half a million men in Vietnam, only 20 percent were actively engaged in combat. They were stretched thin and could not hold on to the territory they fought so hard to take away from the enemy. While U.S. troops were brave and dedicated, a few units (Tiger forces) went wild and committed crimes against the civilian population.

In Saigon, the feud between generals Thieu and Ky ended with both of them sharing the same ticket that carried them to the presidency and vice presidency respectively. Saigon recovered some political stability four years after the ouster and murder of President Diem.

Scenes of the battles of Con Thien, Hill 875 (Dak To) and John Mc Cain's plane being shot down are shown. A disillusioned Mc Namara was transferred to the World Bank.

Chapter 6. Things Fall Apart: January-July 1968

Vietnam was the first real helicopter war. The wonderful plane would take the soldiers anywhere and allow evacuation of the wounded in less than 15 minutes.

The communists tricked Westmoreland into believing that Khe Sanh was the ultimate battleground while they gathered most of their troops around the cities of South Vietnam to begin the Tet offensive.

The attacks began on January 31, 1968, one day earlier in central South Vietnam than in the Mekong delta and involved 36 provincial capitals, 5 autonomous cities, and 72 district towns. ARVN soldiers repulsed all the attacks and drove the enemy away in less than a day, except in Hue where the enemy held on for three weeks. Two weeks after the end of the offensive, a U.S. company found a mass grave of civilians on the outskirts of Hue along the Perfume River. Women, even children with hands tied in their back, were also killed with bullets or heavy blows to the heads. Many had even been buried alive. Nguyen Ngoc and Ho Huu Lan, two NVA commanders explained that during the Hue takeover, the VC elements within the city having dropped their covers during the attack had been recognized by Hue citizens. Therefore, before leaving the city the NVA systematically executed at least 2,800 (the real number could be higher) innocent civilians so that the underground VC elements could remain undetected. Ngoc admitted that it was a "massacre, a stain on the revolution, a brutality." Hanoi and even some Americans had always denied the Hue massacre, which turned out to be five to ten times bigger than My Lai.

Hanoi by launching the offensive expected that the ARVN would collapse and the people would rise against the government. None of that happened for no ARVN unit had defected, and no popular uprising was noted. Of the 84,000 NVA and VC soldiers who participated in the attacks, 58,000 were killed.

President Johnson decided not to run again and Martin Luther King was assassinated.

Chapter 7. The Veneer of Civilization: June 1968-May 1969

Civilian opposition against the war continued although Hanoi finally agreed to sit down and discuss with Saigon. Nixon won the presidency in 1968 beating Humphrey by less than 1% of the votes.

The veneer of civilization is thin as nice men could commit atrocities during the war.

Chapter 8. The History of the World: April 1969-May 1970

The battle of Hill 937 (Hamburger Hill) was discussed.

President Nixon introduced Vietnamization in order to get U.S. soldiers out of Vietnam. Vietnamization was a misnomer because the ARVN has been fighting against the VC all along in their country. It was realized that many ARVN units had been fighting well. Tom Vallely said, "We overstate their incompetence because we want to overstate our importance."

Although the My Lai Massacre was much smaller than the Hue Massacre, it was much more publicized than the latter.

Chapter 9. A Disrespectful Loyalty: May 1970-March 1973

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More about the antiwar movement.

The NVA launched another offensive called the Eastern Offensive of 1972 aiming at Quang Tri, Kontum, and An Loc. All these attacks were repulsed with the help of U.S. B-52 bombers.

In secret negotiations with North Vietnam, Kissinger allowed the North Vietnamese to keep hundreds of thousands of NVA troops in South Vietnam in exchange for U.S. troops getting out of Vietnam. The proposition effectively sealed the fate of South Vietnam.

Chapter 10. The Weight of Memory (March 1973-onward)

After the Americans left, the South Vietnamese soldiered on trying to preserve the independence of their country. Without money and resources, South Vietnam fell under the aggression of 18 NVA divisions. ARVN soldiers and government officials were sent to reeducation. Those who could, escaped as boat people. The rest lived imprisoned in their own land under the dictatorship of a communist state.

Communist aggression

Ken Burns is a masterful storyteller who only emphasizes what he wants to emphasize and leaves out what he does not want to discuss. He shows us a dominant Johnson who believed he could wage the war in Vietnam while trying to solve the social and racial problems of America. There was an indecisive Westmoreland who was upstaged by the communists on the battlefield and a disillusioned McNamara who was ready to bail out back in 1965.

Beginning with the third episode, Burns introduces to us Jean-Marie and Carol Crocker, respectively the mother and sister of Denton "Mogie" Crocker. While we never got to meet Mogie, Jean-Marie and Carol are ever present in the documentary from one episode to another to fill us in with details about Mogie who was killed eight months after setting foot in Vietnam. Their narratives seem to convey the message that the war was senseless.

Burns then shows us a few veterans who after their tour of duty in Vietnam switched to the antiwar movement. The war, they suggest, did not make sense to them. It was immoral, despite the fact that the communists invaded South Vietnam and the South Vietnamese were trying to control that invasion with the help of the U.S. The war strategy used did not seem to work: there was no need to conquer a hill at great human cost and vacate it a few days later only to come back and reconquer the same hill a week or two down the road. This was followed by an extensive review of the antiwar movement throughout the last five episodes.

The other thing Burns was willing to show was the disconnection between the antiwar movement and the rest of the country itself. While young men died in Vietnam sometimes in horrible deaths, other young men in the U.S. waved the Viet Cong flag and flew it in New York City. While young men died on the war front, a Jane Fonda went to Hanoi to denounce them. In one scene, young soldiers were shown fighting and dying on a hill infested with communist forces. This was immediately followed by another scene of antiwar movement in the U.S. where attendees were seen singing, smoking, and dancing.

The selection of interviewees is skewed toward the antiwar movement. Of the two million veterans who had served in Vietnam, only a few veterans who had fulfilled their duty and had been honorably discharged were interviewed. Also, those interviewed on the South Vietnamese side either held grudge against the South Vietnamese government (Tran Ngoc Chau, Phan Quang Tue) or were part of the antiwar movement (Mai Elliott). Chau was once imprisoned by the Thieu government and Tue's father Phan Quang Dan was also imprisoned by the Diem government. Mai Elliott was married to the antiwar activist David Elliott; she also had a sister who was a militant PAVN officer (People's Army of Vietnam). Both Mai and David serve on the documentary's advisory board. Mai wore too many hats to truly speak for the South Vietnamese side.

The message conveyed in the documentary seems to be that of the antiwar movement: "make peace not

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war." Appropriately, the work should have been labeled "The Antiwar Movement" and not the "Vietnam War."

The South Vietnamese viewed the war as a northern aggression against the South, and therefore had waged a "war against communist aggression" and tried to preserve their South Vietnamese heritage or what was left of Vietnam. For a long time, they knew that Ho was a communist who just placed communism before his country. Many Vietnamese nationalists who had joined Ho in his fight against the French, had returned to the nationalist capitalist under the banner of the Republic of Vietnam. President Diem and his successors had asked for U.S. support in their fight against communist aggression, an aggression which HCM brought to Indochina when he first accepted the job of representative of the Comintern in Canton in 1924. Under Le Duan, the CPV (communist party of Vietnam) invaded and conquered South Vietnam on April 30, 1975, 51 years after Ho swore allegiance to the Comintern and worldwide communism. Communism is a foreign western political theory that did not exist in Vietnam until 1930.

The South Vietnamese viewed themselves as holding the bastion of anticommunism for the Free World. For two decades they fought against the invading northern communists while trying to build a democracy in South Vietnam. This was for them a life and death situation. If they succeeded, they would have built another democracy similar to South Korea, if they failed they would be the modern wandering Jews. Unluckily, they lost to the communists in a bitter 21-year war that killed more than 3 million Vietnamese, North and South. South Vietnam, a country with 17 million people in the 1960s, lost a total of 300,000 soldiers or the equivalent of 4 million people for a country the size of the U.S.

If the French colonialists were bad, the Vietnamese communists were worse. The latter, although victorious, never looked for reconciliation; and to this day, 42 years after the war they just wanted to eradicate the South Vietnamese and the vestiges of the South Vietnamese society. After the war, government officials and ARVN soldiers were sent to reeducation camps—some for 17 years—while civilians were shipped to new economic zones. Properties, buildings, offices, houses were nationalized and distributed to communist officials. Overnight, the South Vietnamese lost their citizenship and many were evicted from their own homes and dispossessed. They lived under a reign of terror losing not only their status, but also the meager possessions they had accumulated for years if not decades. They then tried to escape from their own land that had become an unwelcome place and died at sea while escaping. Three million of these people had made their lives in western countries building a new Vietnamese community worldwide that is different from communist Vietnam. The overseas refugees remain connected together under their old South Vietnamese flag: yellow background with three red stripes.

In the old country, communism led to a bankrupt society as Hanoi realized that destroying a society was

much easier than rebuilding it. Only a few families wanted to work in communes where each person was paid 12 kilos of rice per month with no incentive to earn more. Output decreased and inflation rose. The wars against Cambodia then China depleted the country's remaining reserves. U.S. embargo against the militant communist regime caused further financial downturn. Famine reared its ugly face. More than a decade after the war (1986), Hanoi decided to slowly open up the society (doi moi) and let farmers sell their surplus produce. Overseas Vietnamese sent merchandise and money to relatives in Vietnam and helped stabilize the economy. Investments crept in. Life

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became more tolerable, although the poor remained poor. With investment money coming in, the communists helped themselves with a large chunk of aid. For every \$10 assigned to a public project, \$7 is going to someone's pocket. Vietnam becomes one of the most corrupt countries in the world scoring 31 out of 100 possible good points (2016 corruption index 113/177) and index of economic freedom (148/178). While the 2016 GDP per capita is \$2,300, there is someone in HCM City who can afford a T shirt from Hermes for \$500 or a watch from Versace for \$15,000. (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/apr/22/vietnam-40-years-on-how-communist-victory-gave-way-to-capitalist-corruption>).

If more than four decades after the Vietnam War, Americans are still divided between the opponents and supporters of the war, the Vietnamese live under the "worst of two systems: the authoritarian socialist state and the unfettered ideology of neoliberalism; the two combining to strip Vietnam's people of their money and their rights while a tiny elite fills its pockets and hides behind the rhetoric of the revolution."

Bao Ninh a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldier who was sent to fight in the highlands of South Vietnam was seen uttering these words in the first episode of the documentary:

*"Even the Vietnamese veterans, we avoid talking about the war.
Who won who lost is not a question...
In war, no one wins or loses,
There is only destruction."*

The revolution in the end fought for money, power, and control of Vietnam: it sacrificed and killed millions of gullible Vietnamese in order to achieve hegemony over Vietnam and to become "red capitalists" who left in their wake tens of millions disabled and poor people who lack any rights. On the other hand, the three million former South Vietnamese who escaped from Saigon in and after 1975, true to their spirit, live free in western countries and are fighting for freedom and human rights in Vietnam.

The Burns-Novick's *Vietnam War* is not the war I had witnessed and seen in the late 1960's and early 1970's. It was violent, traumatic, and full of tears and suffering with VC killing and terrorizing hamlet people and NVA soldiers invading South Vietnam. It was VC throwing grenades at gatherings, bombing restaurants and the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, and cities being attacked and shelled by the NVA. Viewing the documentary, I feel like I was on another planet and not in Vietnam during that period. I then realize that this is a wild reconstruction by Burns and Novick, which may turn out to be a great documentary for the antiwar movement and communism.

Ken Burn's 'Vietnam' is Fair to the Troops, but not to the Cause *Mark Moyar*

WSJ Oct. 6, 2017 5:07 p.m. ET

For the past several years, American and South Vietnamese veterans awaited Ken Burns's "The Vietnam War" series with gnawing fear. Would Mr. Burns use his talent and prestige to rehash the antiwar narrative, which casts veterans as hapless victims of a senseless war? The program's final episode has aired, and it is safe to say that worries about the portrayal of veterans were somewhat misplaced, while those concerning the war itself proved justified.

Mr. Burns and co-producer Lynn Novick should be commended for giving veterans a central role in the series. In the interviews, American veterans explain they were driven to serve mainly out of patriotism and admiration of veterans in their communities. They denounce the caricature of veterans as deranged baby-killers. Several South Vietnamese veterans are featured as well, a welcome change from earlier productions.

The treatment of the war itself is much less evenhanded. The documentary corrects a few of the mistakes that have been common to popular accounts, for instance acknowledging that Ho Chi Minh was a full-blooded communist, who pulled the strings of the ostensibly independent southern Viet Cong. Yet the show mostly follows the same story line as the last PBS megaseries, "Vietnam: A Television History," which aired in 1983.

The documentary's 18 hours highlight the worst military setbacks incurred by the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies, while spending little time on the far more numerous battles in which the North Vietnamese suffered decisive defeat. Most of the combat scenes involve one or two Americans speaking somberly over gloomy music while the screen displays images of American troops who are dead, wounded or under fire. The interviewees then explain how the trauma and futility of battle led to their disillusionment with the war. On the few occasions when we hear of the excitement, camaraderie and pride that are as much a part of war as the fear and sorrow, the words usually come from the mouths of North Vietnamese veterans.

Some American troops did become disenchanted, joining the likes of John Kerry and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and they deserve to be heard. But they do not merit the disproportionate airtime they are given in this series. Even by the most generous estimates, Vietnam Veterans Against the War never represented more than 1% of Vietnam veterans, whereas 90% of Vietnam combat veterans said they were glad to have served, and 69% said they enjoyed their time there, according to a 1980 [survey](#) conducted by the Veterans Administration. Yet about one-third of the American military veterans in the show otherwise espoused antiwar views, and few of the other interviewees expressed pride or satisfaction in their service.

Among those surveyed by the Veterans Administration, 92% agreed with the statement that "the trouble in Vietnam was that our troops were asked to fight in a war which our political leaders in Washington would not let them win." This subject seldom arises in the on-camera interviews or in the narration, presumably because it doesn't fit the narrative of an unwinnable war. The audience does not hear of the bitter disputes in Washington over the use of U.S. ground forces in Laos or North Vietnam. Nor does it mention revelations from North Vietnamese officials acknowledging that such measures would have thwarted Hanoi's strategy.

The documentary disregards most of the positive achievements of America's South Vietnamese allies. Viewers are told that South Vietnam's strategic hamlet program—which sought to stem communist influence in the countryside—destroyed itself by alienating the rural population. Never mind that numerous North Vietnamese communists have admitted the program hurt them until it was disbanded after the American-sponsored coup of November 1963. The remarkable improvement of the South Vietnamese armed forces after the Tet Offensive receives less attention from the filmmakers than the Woodstock Festival.

After some initial discussion of America's strategic rationale for the war—the fear of Asian countries falling to communism like dominoes—the series goes silent on geopolitics. The audience isn't informed of facts that demonstrated Vietnam's strategic importance, such as the fervent support of America's Asian allies for the intervention, or the role of American intervention in averting a communist takeover of Indonesia in late 1965.

Historical perspective is also lacking. The narrator and several subjects suggest that the lies of

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Ken Burns' 'Vietnam' is Fair to the Troops, but not to the Cause...

successive U.S. presidents invalidated the American cause. There is no denying that John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon lied repeatedly about the war. The same could be said about Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, but no one argues that their dishonesty discredited their wars. Numerous interviewees contend that the ineffectiveness and corruption of the South Vietnamese government showed that the U.S. supported the wrong side. But America's allies in South Korea and Taiwan, who were less effective and more corrupt than their communist rivals, survived because the U.S. did not abandon them. South Korea and Taiwan eventually became two of the most prosperous and vibrant nations in Asia, while their foes remain dour police states that still pose serious threats to international peace. Mr. Burns has said he intended to produce a definitive account that would bring Americans together. He could have pulled it off, but he chose instead to make it another partisan harangue that is certain to keep Americans divided.

Reflections on Burns-Novick Vietnam Documentary Film *Frank Scotton*

Friends who have read UPHILL BATTLE, an account of events observed in Viet Nam 1962 through 1975, and who know that I met twice with Lynn Novick; have asked me to share thoughts about the recently televised Burns - Novick multi-chapter film account portraying the Vietnamese and American experience in Viet Nam from after World War II through 1975.

This is the most important film description of the subject that we will have. It will be available for audiences around the world and intensely viewed in America and Viet Nam. Researchers, students, policy analysts, will plumb this series and associated archived material (collected by the Burns -Novick team) for decades, long after those of us with intimate experience have fallen to the actuarial axe. It will never be matched in scope because no future directorial team will have equivalent resources, time, and access to living participants of the multiple sides engaged.

There are two fundamental errors. (1) Viet Nam should be spelled as two separate words, not run together for (originally) telex convenience. (2) There was no NLF in Viet Nam (as there had been in Algeria) because the Vietnamese title for the organization sponsored by the communist party to agitate and operate militarily in the south of Viet Nam was: Mat Tran Dan Toc Giai Phong Mien Nam Viet Nam, translating as Peoples Front for the Liberation of the South of Viet Nam. From the perspective of party headquarters in Hanoi it would be absurd to have a national liberation entity because the north was already "liberated". Those two ignorant errors persist almost universally today. It is no excuse to argue that an article, book, film or telecast is simply adopting conventional usage for simplicity's sake. Think how aggrieved we would feel if our own country was referenced as United States of America. The Burns - Novick project should have been an important bench-mark corrective. They were let down by their research group and I feel guilt for not stressing the importance of correct terminology when speaking with Lynn.

There are minor mistakes that could have been caught by researchers. The origin of the term "gook" was during the American "pacification" campaigns in the Philippines...not elsewhere as suggested early in the series. I am pretty sure that the M-16 difficulty was not due to design flaw, but instead to a change of ammunition during which a manufacturer slightly altered production characteristics. On a very few occasions narration and visual do not accord, but the incidence is far less than observed in other film/television presentations.

There are vacuums that ought to have been filled. For the benefit of viewers, decades to come, mention should have been made of pre-Ho Chi Minh resistance against the French (Cuong De and De Tham could have been easily noted) and the more contemporary (for Ho while in Comintern service) Yen Bai (alternate spelling Yen Bai) uprising. Ho, and not to diminish his historic significance, was more inheritor of resistance spirit than initiator. The most sensitive vacuum is lack, or insignificant mention, of South Viet Nam (RVN/GVN/2nd ARVN) district (nghia quan) and province (dia phuong quan) defense forces. Especially during early years they were inadequately trained, poorly armed, mis-employed; but rarely defected and suffered significant casualties.

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Reflections on Burns-Novick Vietnam Documentary Film...

Another important vacuum is bare mention of important subdivisions within the southern portion of Viet Nam: the central highlands tribal attitude to Saigon governance and consequent dearth of friendly eyes and ears in the western border region, origin of Buddhist/Catholic tension and the divisions within each faith, why President Diem was incapable of resolving Buddhist anger in Hue 1963, and not mentioning persons like Phan Quang Dan, Dang Van Sung, and Nguyen Van Bong, implies that the only people of note in Saigon were military figures. If that were so, the communists would not have felt that assassinating Nguyen Van Bong was a necessary action.

Every Vietnamese-American with whom I have recently mentioned the Burns-Novick production feels, very strongly, that presentation "balance" depicting opposing sides during war in Viet Nam is prejudicial. It does appear to me that the weight of visuals is primarily on communist troops (whether PAVN or SVNLF) versus Americans with far less depiction of ARVN elements. I note that visuals and narration, emotionally moving, of Americans meeting former communist combatants while visiting contemporary Viet Nam is not matched by scenes of Americans meeting with former RVNAF friends in Viet Nam. Now, despite numbers having departed Viet Nam or deceased, there are still survivors. So the question arises, why no on camera reunions? Fear of Cong An? Not permitted? I apprehend that some future time will see the communist government of Viet Nam using edited versions of Burns – Novick (deleting their own veterans speaking variant from party dogma) to demonstrate that the war was a two-sided conflict between righteous nationalistic Vietnamese communist party and bumbling intrusive Americans.

OK. There are some really good points and visuals to long remember, so noteworthy that it will be impossible to forget. Especially the helicopters, every model, from the clumsy and regrettable H-21 to the ubiquitous UH-1series (original HU-1), landing us in, taking us out, resupplying, saving lives. They were overwhelmingly much more than the jeeps of our fathers' and uncles' generation.

Description of Ho Chi Minh communist party leadership replaced by Le Duan, with Ho shuffled into subordinate honorary chairman of the board, is correct and necessary to understanding that Le Duan vehemence in pursuit of unification was at least in part for taking his province of birth. Explanation of how enemy casualties were miscalculated, failure to account for inclusion of non-combat categories and civilians, all warping our strategy, is properly not overlooked. I appreciate the inclusion of Nixon and Kissinger audio tapes revealing the duplicitous character of both men as they rationalized maintaining the war on life support until the Republic of Viet Nam could be dumped. Our American shameful cutting and running should never be blamed entirely on congress when it is so demonstrable that the executive branch made that choice much earlier. And John Negroponte convincingly posits Kissinger as "the emperor's counselor" with "no clothes" by having negotiated the fate of Viet Nam absent even a courtesy copy of the draft agreement in Vietnamese.

Two former PAVN members from the north confirming communist atrocities in Hue surprised me, because when accompanied by Bill Bach and conversing with party members in that city 1996, communists were still in denial. I expect that right now those two truth-tellers within the Burns – Novick film are adopting a very low profile. There are other riveting individual appearances by persons who I know and respect. Frank Snepp allows viewers a peek at the confused mind set of Ambassador Martin as our 1975 tattered policy went down the garbage disposal. Bob Sorley honestly, and with pain, shares his evolving appreciation of the Viet Nam Veterans Memorial. Earlier appearances by Rufus Philipps, Tran Ngoc Chau, and Sam Wilson would have been enhanced by a short narrator sentence or two citing the significance of each.

Ken Burns is frequently referred to as America's Storyteller. We need to remind ourselves that any campfire storyteller has difficulty completely and factually reciting grand scale events, tragedies, for listeners. Every storyteller makes mistakes or tells the tale partially. Every author makes mistakes and tells the story partially. I am as scrupulously intent a viewer as reader, and grade the entire Burns- Novick production by beginning with an assigned numeric perfect 100, and then arbitrarily subtracting points for errors or omissions, or adding points for an especially valuable/instructive/illustrative point. We must recognize that there never will be a perfect documentary that satisfies all of us. My personal exercise provides the Burns – Novick production with an 89 score, solid B+.

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Reflections on Burns-Novick Vietnam Documentary Film...

Despite my reservations, and this evaluation notwithstanding, there has never been a better, and doubtful there ever will be a better, visual documentary of what we in America call the “Viet Nam War”, and which in Viet Nam is frequently called the “American War.”

Here follows some specific notes section by section.

Chapter One: Viet Nam is misspelled as Vietnam and that is inexcusable, especially by copping out that everyone else does it. Likewise, using abbreviation NLF to describe southern raised, trained, and operative communist directed forces is faulty. Use of that term demonstrates disregard of Vietnamese language and ignorance of the political point made by use of specific terminology. It can be argued that changing from a common erroneous usage would confuse program viewers, but is not the purpose of documentary to educate, to illuminate?

Something could have been said about the Nguyen dynasty having achieved power by benefit of French assistance; pre-Ho Chi Minh resistance is important to note, as well as other individual Vietnamese, contemporary with Ho, who organized politically.

The maturation of Ho by photographic portrayal through decades is important refutation of the occasional assertion that the Ho of 1945 was a Chinese substitute for the younger man of other names.

Chapter Two: continues faulty use of NLF. There was no such thing. The southern organization established by the national communist party was deliberately named Mat Tran Dan Toc Giai Phong Mien Nam Viet Nam. Nothing national about that, because from the party's point of view the north was already liberated. An accurate translation is: Peoples Front for the Liberation of the South of Viet Nam. A useful and meaningful abbreviation is SVNLF.

Chapter Three: Transition of real authority from Ho to Le Duan, mentioned in the preceding chapter and further developed here, nicely portrays greater commitment to southern strategy and national unification.

The material describing 1964 naval activity along the coast of northern Viet Nam is offered non-judgmentally and, I believe, accurately. This is still a controversial topic, but I believe Burns – Novick have it correct.

Depiction of Washington leadership flailing around the issue of what ought to be done, and LBJ frustration is very good. This begins a painful real world depiction of the “Ellsberg Paradox” that posits study of a specific ongoing problem, consideration of alternative strategy, followed by a decision to continue what has already been proven to fail.

Chapter Four: I know that the organization tasked with maintaining the trail/road system through Laos was unit 559, but I have not heard that the trail/road system itself was called 559. If accurate, this is a new nugget for me.

Presentation of the HES system correctly refers to it as a sort of chop suey; but ignores the usefulness of observing trends over time.

Comments by American interviewees reveal the usual foreign confusion between villages and hamlets, soldiers referring to difficulty entering a “village” when the visual is obviously a hamlet.

Portrayal of “collateral” damage in the countryside was, if anything, understated; and even so (based on my experience in central Viet Nam) disturbingly and unpleasantly, familiar.

Providing viewers with exposure to vicious nature of combat in Kontum Province by detailing the 173rd ABN Brigade experience in June 1967 wherein American casualties were more than 130 killed, is grim corrective to the assertion that we always won.

There is good explanation of the relationship between increasing American casualties and exaggeration, mistaken, falsification, of enemy body count, estimates, and the inclusion of non-combatants.

Chapter Five: I am sure that the origin of “gook” was derived from American operations in the Philippines, not

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otherwise as suggested by the documentary film.

A different USMC approach to rural security was noted in this chapter but not sufficiently explained.

The assertion of M-16 design flaw is, I think, mistaken. Discussion, decades ago, with experts persuaded me that the field problem was due to increased rifle production necessitating a contract change with new company, for ammunition by which slightly altered specifications negatively affected blow-back and ejection of spent cartridges.

Mention of racist attitudes in Viet Nam is uncomfortable reminder that killing is facilitated by first dehumanizing.

Mention within this chapter that prisoners were well-treated, but had to be transferred to the rear area (Catch 22) in order to be so classified. Obvious implications.

Descriptions of Con Thien geography and intense sitting duck circumstance, formulation of 1967 Thieu/Ky elections ticket, both very good.

Presentation of Le Duan and colleagues planning for the 1968 Offensive is fine illustration that opponents, like ourselves, do confusing possible, desirable, outcomes with probabilities.

Chapter Six: Portrayal of the "helicopter war" excellent, although it seems to me that something could have been said by the Vietnamese pilots flying SOG special missions in what I felt were obsolescent models.

Overall, episode by episode of the documentary, especially from this point forward I begin to feel that there is uncomfortable and undeniable lack of balance in portrayal of opposing sides; much more SVNLF and PAVN (NVA) depiction than ARVN, leading viewer to false conclusions.

Compared with other Viet Nam documentary programs of the past, there is much better, almost perfect, alignment of narration and visuals. Here and there we do catch an exception. In this chapter there is a short clip of countryside people warmly sending off communist soldiers for the Tet Offensive, and the context suggests that these people were southerners, but by their clothing they appear to be a northern tribal group. Footage from previous French period?

Impact of the Loan photo is correctly noted, although actually the man shot was not a combatant as defined by international law. The context by which the man had operated as a terrorist should have been adequately described. Loan should not have summarily executed the bound captive, but the man was not a prisoner of war.

Two former communist officers (PAVN) confirming communist Hue atrocity is noteworthy because this is a "first". One hopes that those two will be lightly treated by the Viet Nam communist government.

The impact of 1968 communist offensives on American public opinion accords with what I understood at the time; but I do think that presentation and description of the American "peace movement" is too acceptant of the image that the movement leaders promoted for themselves. Otherwise, much of the movement was focused on keeping themselves, or people like themselves, out of combat; and I think it is pretty clear, after discussion with Roger Canfield on this point, that some peace movement people did make contact with communists.

I understand that events in Viet Nam had impact within America, and that there were great social changes underway, but the relationship projected by this documentary was a bit (for me) distorted, resulting in Bobby Kennedy footage that did not tell the viewer anything about Viet Nam. Is this an American tendency to make everything all about us?

Chapter Seven: By this point in the series it is impossible to ignore the lack of time allocated to discussion of RVNAF, including Dia Phuong Quan and Nghia Quan, resulting in conveyance of message that this was a war between America and Viet Nam (communist) with non-communist southerners being tag-alongs.

I like Bob Sorley speaking of General Abrams personality and morning (beware) temperament.

There is interesting discussion of communist party leadership. We could have also benefited from mention of

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leadership alterations in the Republic of Viet Nam since this is the period when Thieu eclipsed Ky.

There is important, well-considered, note that despite all, Vietnamese in Saigon at war were far more free than Vietnamese living in North Viet Nam: exemplified by critical newspapers and opposition figures in the National Assembly.

The segment on the US 9th Division rampage through the upper Mekong Delta with a 46/1 kill ratio is accurately portrayed; but other damning statistics could also have been mentioned: and it ought to be noted that General Julian Ewell subordinate officers were all promoted.

Notation of phony BDAs allows viewers to wonder about contemporary claimed results for drone strike missions.

Kissinger hand in requiring phony target mission reports attendant to bombing Cambodia could have mentioned corrosive effect on USAF officer ethics, morale, and consequences for General Lavelle.... but no problems for the professor from Harvard.

Episode Eight: portrayal of A Shau Valley "hamburger hill" is important illustration of our folly in fighting a "wack a mole" war rather than in 1967 denying the opponent use of the Lao Corridor by establishing and holding a line from Lao Bao (Quang Tri) to the Mekong.

The segment highlighting departure of US maneuver units as sealing the "south fate" includes visual of a 5th Special Forces Group advisor working with trainees on a target range, that I am sure is stock footage from a period few years earlier.

Depiction of Nixon and Kissinger consciously formulating a surrender strategy with theatre curtain fall delayed until after the 1972 election is damning.

Lightly touched upon, but mentioned, is the argument advanced around Washington that we needed to continue combat in order to maintain "credibility" whereas in fact nothing is more destructive of creditability than defeat.

Account of war crimes in Quang Ngai could have explained that some maps colored areas pink to indicate relative population density. Officers and NCOs knew that did not mean concentration of communists. Should also have noted that the correct name of hamlet is Tu Cung of Son My Village, not My Lai. In that place, and nearby, on one ugly day, Americans were as cruel, arguably even worse, than Ratko's gang at Srebrenica decades later. And, ARVN and American officers participated in general cover-up.

Nice note that while 30,000 Americans evaded draft by moving to Canada, an equal number of Canadians came south and served in American armed forces.

Episode Nine: statement that ARVN was main opposition to communist armed forces from 1970 onward ignores RVNAF having been the prime opposition to communists from 1955 to 1965 and at least half the opposition to communist units 1965 through 1970.

Depicting ARVN for the first time on its own during Lam Son 719 is flawed because it fails to account for our controversially compelling Viet Nam to do what we had previously considered and then decided not to do ourselves. And secondly, because during this operation ARVN was importantly supported by American helicopters throughout.

Bao Ninh's comments are, for most viewers, revelatory. His novel will be as revealing a read for anyone now as when first published postwar.

The tape recordings of Nixon and Kissinger betray the shabby nature of BOTH men.

The fundamental question as to whether the war itself was crazy OR crazily waged, was placed before viewers, but left hanging. Intentional?

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A few visual seconds of opposition demonstrations in Saigon include mention of a "third force" in Viet Nam politics, but the term was not defined and should have been dismissed as the illusion that it really was.

Calloused Kissinger on tape recordings prove that he had written off the Republic of Viet Nam, and that his objective, set with Nixon, was to postpone collapse of our ally until after Nixon reelection in 1972. The indecent interval, set in place before the widely cited congressional betrayal, was that first betrayal initiated by a president and his advisor.

The 1972 Spring Offensive is partially described by mention of ARVN 3rd Division collapse in Quang Tri and the RVNAF stand at An Loc; but mention should also have noted a difficult situation in northern Binh Dinh Province and the ARVN 23rd Division holding Kontum.

It should have been noted that PAVN committed two important errors in 1972: failure to make the needed mix of infantry and armor for assault; and encircling rather than allowing opening for opponent retreat with consequent chaos.

Candid commentary by John Negroponte witnessed Kissinger's lack of professional competence.

An agreement that allows the communist government of the northern half of Viet Nam to maintain (with right to resupply and replace personnel) an army within the Republic of Viet Nam! Holy Shit! Tradeoff for return of American prisoners. Welcome to 1972 capitulation, but do not ever again place all the blame on 1975 congressional malfeasance.

Episode 10: Congress took the signal of executive branch disinterest concerning future viability of the Republic of Viet Nam and acted accordingly, forbidding in June all American combat operations effective August 15. And of course, funding later disappears with American troop disappearance.

Bob Sorley's point that it is immoral to be so unfaithful to those who we had induced to battle, needs painful recollection while we ponder future national security policies.

I think asserting that RVNAF began to disintegrate almost immediately is exaggerated. There was unused equipment because the logistics system was overwhelmed. 85 bullets and 1 hand grenade per soldier: I will accept as being so in some circumstances, but I think not everywhere. Distribution was a problem, complicated by some RVN thinking that conservation ought to be applied until 1976 when it was thought need would be greater.

The film footage and narration gives viewer impression that the December 1974 battle for Phuoc Long featured PAVN armor, but I believe only about a dozen T-54s were available and they were introduced piecemeal late in support, not leading the charge.

The decision to withdraw abruptly from the II Corps Highland Provinces was a strategic turning point inadequately discussed.

There is short narrative discussion of civil airlines used for airlift from country during beginning of exit phase; but visual shows an Air America C-46 taxiing in background. Should have been possible to see Air Viet Nam or even Pan Am aircraft.

Frank Snepp gives us excellent description of the peculiarity of Ambassador Martin while all around eroded.

Bob Sorley honest and painful expression of feeling on the final day of collapse and his first visit to the Viet Nam Veterans Memorial fairly mirrors my own.

The Vietnam Documentary & Military Lessons *Bing West*

Sept 19, 2017

The Military History Working Group at Hoover concentrates upon logic, facts, and trends communicated via the written word. At the same time, more people in all strata of society are basing their judgments upon social media and digital images. Consider: almost **60 million people** watched Steven Spielberg and Tom Hank's *Band of Brothers* miniseries. Video attracts audiences one thousand times larger than bestselling books.

Movies aim at shaping a visceral emotion, not rational thinking. Directors speak of movie moments, when an actor utters a line that we all remember, such as Robert Duvall in *Apocalypse Now*, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning." Thus we come to Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's documentary *The Vietnam War*, about which the *Washington Post* trumpeted, "**astounding...required viewing.**"

As catharsis, the documentary is balm for those who opposed the war. War, in this telling, results in nothing. John Kerry and Henry Kissinger emerge as quasi-heroes, alongside an agonized Johnson, an idiotic Westmoreland, and a duplicitous Nixon. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are non-entities, the South Vietnamese feckless, the North Vietnamese stalwart, and American soldiers bewildered. The musical score is haunting, ironic, and doleful, while the American veterans on camera are sad, disillusioned, and rueful.

The emotional effect of the film persuades the viewer that America was predestined to defeat because we had replaced France as a colonial power. The North Vietnamese juggernaut could not be denied by force because they were fighting for independence, while the South Vietnamese leaders were corrupt and the Americans were inferior fighters callous toward the rural southern villagers who aligned with the North. Inevitably, the tide of history doomed America.

Not so fast; an alternative case can be made that our military and political leaders doomed their own mission by strategic confusion and entropy of will. Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford is quoted as telling President Johnson, "We're not out to win the war. We're out to win the peace." (Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *The Vietnam War: An Intimate History* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), p. 298.) Such psycho-babble led to baffling negotiations, with war-fighting without a clear objective. We pursued a half-hearted strategy of attrition, which is the lack of strategy. We granted the enemy ground sanctuaries in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. After we withdrew in 1972, Congress forbade all future bombing and slashed aid to the South Vietnamese, while the Soviet Union and China provided heavy weapons to the North. Those actions certainly contributed to the collapse in 1975.

At the conclusion of the 18-hour series, a veteran who fought there in 1965 delivers this peroration, "We have learned a lesson... that we just can't impose our will on others." (Ibid., p 565.) What does it portend when that is the enduring message from a documentary lavishly praised and viewed by tens of millions?

The true lesson is that wars *should* be fought to impose your will upon the enemy. If you don't intend to accomplish that or if the costs, however enumerated, exceed the gains from the war, don't fight. But given how we have over 16 years driven backwards into a tribal cul-de-sac in Afghanistan, while Pakistan provides sanctuary for the Taliban's Islamist extremists, we haven't learned that lesson.

The Vietnam Documentary & Military Lessons...

September 21, 2017

Where to start? Episode 4, Resolve (Jan 66-Jun 67), was by far the most emotional. Toward the end, one would have to be awfully hardhearted to watch the resolution of the Denton W. Crocker, Jr. storyline and not be in tears. A master storyteller sets these things up, and Burns has been setting this element up since at least episode two. We've come to like and admire not just Denton but his mother and sister. More than like and admire, we identify with them. By his demise Denton has become our son, our brother, our friend. This is very powerful. Exactly what is needed to convince a viewer who might be skeptical of Burns' historical perspective, to essentially throw in the towel. Don't! Just as Burns wants you to empathize with the plight of American troops yet despise American involvement, I'm asking you to honor the courage and sacrifices of American troops, but also to understand the greater story and thereby not deny meaning to their courage and sacrifices.

I am no fan of Lyndon Johnson or Robert McNamara. Their strategic handling of the war—both in the war zone and on the home front—reeks of irresponsibility and ineptitude. Their meddling in day-to-day tactical decisions was ludicrous. And most upsetting to me, and not a word of this in the Burns documentary other than a very general statement that it was denied, was their active ignorance of General Westmoreland's clear-sighted op-plan to stop Northern infiltration and turn over *in-country* fighting of domestic terrorists (VC, though this is not fully accurate as we'll see below) to the Army of The Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

As early as 1965 Westmoreland recognized the interdiction inadequacies of the system he'd inherited, and he'd surmised the war could not be won by simply defending South Vietnamese territory and killing invaders thereof. He knew that to control a defensive border—a line running from the tip of the Mekong Delta north along the borders with Cambodia and Laos then east across the DMZ to the South China Sea, a distance of over 700 miles—would take upwards of 1.5 to 2 million troops. He summed up his solution, laid out in Op Plan York, as such: I continued for long to hope for an international force to man a line below the DMZ and across the Laos panhandle... From the first I contemplated eventually moving into Laos to cut and block the infiltration routes of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and in 1966 and 1967 my staff prepared detail plans for such an operation.

Below the DMZ, from the South China Sea to the Mekong River and border with Thailand is approximately 125 miles. This is approximately one sixth the length of border Johnson's strategy required defending. It would have required approximately one sixth the troops, somewhere in the order of 300,000 to 350,000. Johnson, McNamara, and other's in that administration turned the general down. Westmoreland repeated his request with Op Plans El Paso I and El Paso II. U.S. Ambassador to The Republic of Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker, backed Westmoreland.

Politically-imposed restrictions on military operations were not just casing inefficiencies and increasing casualties, they were perverting the operations themselves. Sweep and destroy missions in or close to population concentrations were Plan-B expedencies. Think of it this way: a group of armed crazies forms up outside your condominium complex. They enter the property. They kill your neighbor's dog. They demand that all owners support them with food and funds. You are restricted by law from physically opposing them. Then they enter your neighbor's unit. You hear violence, panic. They break into your house, begin raping your wife and daughter, and are about to kill you. At this point the restrictions are lifted and you are allowed to shoot. The problem now is how to shoot without harming your wife and daughter, and without collateral damage going through your walls into adjoining units of even burning the complex to the ground.

Johnson and McNamara enforced the use of Plan-B and attempted to offset it with a bombing campaign in the next town over. Combat roles became twisted.

Westmoreland continuously attempted to convince LBJ that it was better to meet the horde before they entered the property. "...it was essential for me to plan ahead," he wrote in *A Soldier Reports*, "to develop contingency plans... A staff section known as J-5 developed multiple plans... I was particularly pleased with three plans developed for Laos. I am convinced two, and probably the third, would have succeeded, would

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The Vietnam Documentary & Military Lessons...

have eliminated the enemy's steady flow of men and supplies through the Laotian Panhandle, and would have materially shortened American involvement in the war."

In 1967, to account for increased enemy infiltration, Westmoreland modified the York plan. As the year progressed, activity levels and intelligence reports indicated a new enemy offensive was about to unfold.

"The enemy's aggressive tactics..." Westmoreland wrote, "...at Dak To (3-22 November) and elsewhere contrasted sharply with an article by (NVA) General Giap published in September 1967... in an official North Vietnamese journal. Giap proclaimed (the need) for a protracted war of attrition and urged conserving forces." Westmoreland, matching the article with captured enemy documents, recognized Giap's use. By the end of the year he was anticipating a major offensive, the communist's "long heralded 'final phase' of the war." Still Johnson kept Westmoreland's strike plans in limbo. Anticipating approval, and hoping to preempt the suspected enemy offensive of 1968, Westmoreland ordered his staff to update Op Plan York. 6000 Marines logged at or near the Special Forces camp at Kham Duc near the Laotian border because the base had the best air field—equipped with all-weather radar and navigations aids—in the border zone of the northern provinces. Approval for the operation never came.

Critics might scoff at Westmoreland's York planning, but two additional factors should be considered before one decides. 1) A modified form of York was the basis for Operation Lam Son 719 launched in January 1971 under General Creighton Abrams (Westmoreland's successor) and approved by President Nixon; 2) North Vietnamese commander Bui Tin, after the war, stated that what the Northern leaders feared most was a strategy which would permanently cut the trail. At the time Lam Son 719 (also called the Laotian Incursion) was approved, American forces were being withdrawn from Vietnam. All of the ground fighting was turned over to South Vietnamese troops, although they were transported into battle on American helicopter, had American air cover, and were supplied up to the border by American convoys. North Vietnamese intelligence had discovered the plan, and massive troop movements brought men and materiel not only from all over Laos, but units that had been stationed in South Vietnam, Cambodia and North Vietnam joined the fight.

One must wonder: What if?! What if Johnson had backed Westmoreland's plan in 1965? Or 1966? Or 1967? What if there was never a need to count bodies because territory was being held? What if only the ARVN (plus RF/PF forces) dealt with indigenous insurgents? [As to the claim of being indigenous—by 1970 Northern troops comprised 95% of all VC units, and from years earlier, 100% of the VC political cadre and military command was Northern.] That situation did, by the way, pretty much come to pass by 1970, and the indigenous insurgents proved to be no match for the ARVN. In fact, and this is a major flaw in episode 4, the ARVN which every year became a more accomplished fighting force, is only mentioned in a few negative incidents.

There is so much more real material on the events covered in the last episode it will take a book, or many books, to cover in any sort of depth.

Mr. Burns and Ms Novick, shame on you! You either don't have a clue to what went on behind the headlines, or you have chosen to present a very lopsided story designed to alter a far more accurate cultural-story.

Comments on Burns-Novick Vietnam Documentary Film *Jay Veith*

The staggering complexity of the Vietnam War has resisted any conclusive definition of what precisely the war was about. Much like physics, we have no “grand unified theory” among either scholars or the Public. One can command a dizzying array of facts about the war, or fervently believe a variety of historical “truths,” yet remain surprisingly uninformed. Perhaps the sheer scope and breadth of that long conflict prevents easy explanation, as colonialism, nationalism, ideology, and civil war intertwined to create a historical facsimile of the Gordian Knot. Worse, possessing intimate knowledge of the war often leads to disdain for other viewpoints, rejecting even the slightest opening to contrary perspectives. Such divides long ago hardened into competing views, with each side unfortunately seeing its perspective as canon, and the other as heretical.

The Burns/Novick documentary hoped to bridge that divide, and spark healing among these factions. According to Burns, they sought neutrality, to in his words, “only call balls and strikes.” Perhaps seeking middle ground was the best approach. Undoubtedly, most people watching, especially those without specialized knowledge of the war, or who did not live through those times, will view the series as Magisterial. I suspect, however, that much like the 1983 PBS effort, those invested in a particular political viewpoint will not be pleased with the outcome.

Each side—left and right—wants vindication instead of being forced to accept “alternative facts.” My review of several hundred news articles and commentaries about the film seems to confirm my misgivings. Reading these reviews reminds me of the biblical verse from Revelations; because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

If Burns and Novick sought fairness, then it behooves us to also “call balls and strikes” of their 10-year effort. In my view, the filmmakers are to be commended for creating an amazing movie, one that covers the war’s span. Most important, the filmmakers sought out numerous sides, from young men who answered their country’s call, to others who became draft resisters.

Yet even with an exhausting 18 hours, in many ways it is a lengthy redundancy, repeating old stories and unchallenging surface realities. The war was never black and white, but shades of grey reflecting multiple variations of “truth.”

Naturally focused on the American experience, the series portrays how the United States entered the war, its effect on both the servicemen and their suffering families, and its influence upon American society and government. The film also represents those who resisted it, and while the series appears to take umbrage at some anti-war protests, one senses an understated yet pervasive anti-war sentiment. In many clips, one sees protestors waving Viet Cong flags, yet the commentator never remarks on this obvious absurdity. Most U.S. veterans shown, perhaps because their involvement spanned a substantial portion of the war, seem chosen solely to provide authentic voices from those who became opposed to the war. Yet rarely do we see American veterans who were proud of their services, and did not believe the war was a mistake.

It seems disingenuous to portray one Marine though a major part of the series, only to learn near the end that he eventually joined the Vietnam Veteran’s Against the War. Moreover, while accurate to highlight flawed American battle tactics, such as taking a hill at great cost only to subsequently retreat shortly thereafter, it does not provide a corresponding view of the many successful battles that drove off enemy units. It seems that only the negative was accentuated, mainly to provide the unspoken thesis of the war as a costly mistake. To support that implicit narrative, there seems an overt cherry-picking of White House tapes from both the Johnson and Nixon eras. If on multiple instances both presidents were taped clearly outlining their policies to help the South Vietnamese, but on occasion lapsed into doubt, and only the doubts are broadcast, what does that say about the motivations of the directors? I once asked Dr. Kissinger specifically about the comment heard on the film that “no one will care about Vietnam in a year.” He observed that U.S. officials and policymakers are also human, subject to the same doubts and fatigues as others, and hence liable to express frustration at an intractable problem. Yet in isolation it is portrayed as a cynical comment revealing Kissinger and Nixon’s true feelings, rather than one remark among many.

Commendably, the film was translated into Vietnamese and is being shown online in that country. The film pro-

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vides voices from the other side, often measured and on occasion, willing if somewhat grudgingly, to admit past mistakes. However, it required a young journalist named Huy Duc to speak more forthrightly than the others. Duc's two books criticized the government without raising a backlash, but we shall see if that remains the case after the film's airing. So far, however, the Vietnamese government's response has been muted, with only the Foreign Ministry making a bland statement that they hoped the filmmakers would understand that the war was a "righteous revolution that mobilized the entire nation, and was supported wholeheartedly by friends and people worldwide."

The film's most egregious flaw is the unflattering view of the Nationalist, or South Vietnamese, voice, who are portrayed almost continually as corrupt, authoritarian, and cowardly. These have become code words, meant to delegitimize a country and her people, making them not worth fighting or dying for. South Vietnam certainly had those elements, but also many positive accomplishments that were never mentioned. South Vietnam was unquestionably flawed, and we can easily enumerate those faults, but it was a relatively free and struggling to become a democracy while concurrently fighting an implacable enemy that used terrorism to achieve its aims ("The Vietnam War Draws Muted Official Response in Hanoi" Asia News Monitor [Bangkok], September 25, 2017). It is a clever editorial trick to use South Vietnamese to criticize their own former government. This, however, is an easy accomplishment, as the South Vietnamese even today remain riven by factions and incessant back-biting. If truly designed to be neutral, then why no corresponding voice discussing Saigon's many accomplishments, like Land Reform, or that thousands of enemy soldiers left their own ranks to join the South Vietnamese under a program known as Chieu Hoi?

For example, we are told that Party Secretary Le Duan launched the 1968 Tet offensive because he believed the South Vietnamese military would quickly collapse, and the South Vietnamese people would rise and take to the streets to overthrow their government. We are provided numerous interviews with Communist soldiers and cadre who fought during the battle and admitted this did not occur. Yet only at the end does the commentator acknowledge that the ARVN fought well, and that the civilians did not rise, although he claims they simply hid in their houses. Such begrudging afterthoughts are, as the daughter of a South Vietnamese general remarked, are "like a rifle butt to the heart." Ultimately, I believe that, despite a valiant effort, this was at best an imperfect effort to tell an extraordinary complex story. At worst, it has cemented, perhaps forever, the old stereotypes; the U.S. as bumbling interlopers layering mistakes upon bad judgment and governmental deceit, of the Communists as ardent nationalists simply trying to unify their country, and the Southerners as corrupt incompetents not worth the lives of American men. The film serves as a stark reminder, that "In war truth is the first casualty."

When Burns' "Vietnam" on PBS Matters *Roger Canfield*

California Political Review. October 4, 2017

With monuments falling and history burned, comes renewed foci on America's faults. Vietnam is exhibit A. "A good deal of the disunion ... we experience today really metastasized in Vietnam," says filmmaker Ken Burns. A creative genius, Burns is America's greatest storyteller since Mark Twain. Unlike Twain, Burns does not admit to fictitious works. He has perfected manipulating human emotions. He selected veterans whose war stories bring one to tears, anger and even hate. Ho Chi Minh said America's policy was "burn all, kill all and destroy all," using "napalm bombs, poison gas and toxic chemicals to massacre our compatriots and ravage our villages." [1] Burns fills the screen with the orange fires, bloody slaughter and destroyed hamlets — that do not fit the narrative's timeline. No matter. An ugly America is repeatedly depicted waging an illegal, immoral, unjust, racist and unwinnable war. You see, America "misreads" the war as fighting communism. Burns quickly passes over Ho's 20 years as a paid agent of the international communism and his receipt of massive Soviet and Chicom weaponry. To Burns, America is the real enemy in Vietnam. Episode 1 begins with the sound of helicopter blades and a montage of scenes symbolically running rapidly backwards out of Vietnam. [2] Veteran Karl Marlantes has an unfriendly homecoming — strangely, not spitting or being called a "baby killer." No one talks about Vietnam. Burns does that definitively. Almost all of Burns' facts are true as far as they go. The emotional impact of 60's music, iconic photos and human pain easily pass by contradictory facts.

Many of Burns' vets are disillusioned antiwar activists. They fear attacks of resolute enemy troops. They grow increasingly cynical about the war, their presidents, and the South Vietnamese and decreasingly patriotic. They say little positive about their service. In truth, 90% of the combat veterans of Vietnam were proud of their service [killing babies?]. Such vets do not fit into Burns tour de force.

Inspired by their enlightened leaders, Ho and Giap, hundreds of thousands of larger-than-life heroic "volunteers" drafted Vietnamese peasants, march hundreds of miles of jungles. Ho revered Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin, but deceitfully claims Tom Jefferson, George Washington [3] as his own. Of course, liars, incompetents and cowards in Saigon and Washington led the USA.

Burns' chosen narrator, Peter Coyote, is a former hippy Diggers and player in the Marxist San Francisco Mime Troupe. He whines on about the futility of an unwinnable war. The war puts "Everything in question ... the candor of leaders. ... What does it mean to be a patriot? Was it worth it?" Rhetorical questions beg Burns' answers. A blizzard of facts and a cacophony of sounds obscure key points and advance falsehoods. Here's some examples. Ho Chi Minh was an international communist, not a patriotic Vietnamese nationalist. "Reuniting" Vietnam is a fraud. There was no Vietnam whole to reunite. There was French colonial Indochina [4] targeted in 1932 by Ho's Communist Party of Indochina. On March 6, 1946, Ho Chi Minh and French General Sainteny signed a deal returning Vietnam to the French Union, inviting 15,000 French troops to re-enter Indochina. The deal enabled the removal of anticommunists, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists troops and the elimination of "reactionary" nationalists. In 1954, the U.S. and Saigon Vietnam did not sign the Geneva Accords. They had no obligations to an unsigned "agreement." The allies did not "promise" unsupervised communist controlled elections. [5] Burns admits "thousands" killed in Ho's 1954-5 land reform. The actual "thousands" murdered was 50,000.

The main antagonists in Burns' morality play, other than lying presidents, were corrupt Saigon leaders and their cowardly troops. In fact, President Ngo Dinh Diem formed a democracy, the Republic of Vietnam; drove communists and gangsters out of Saigon; began land reforms and hamlet security; and appointed Buddhists to his cabinet. Today Vietnamese hold Diem in the highest esteem. [6] In 1959, Hanoi, not the U.S., secretly started the war in South Vietnam when the Poliburo ordered Unit 559 to build the Ho Chi Minh Trail. For refusing to march into a

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When Burns' "Vietnam" on PBS Matters...

death trap at Ap Bac in 1963, the Saigon press, (Neil Sheehan, David Halberstam, and Malcomb Brown) aided by an English speaking Hanoi spy, Pham Xuan An, created the storyline Vietnam's troops were always cowardly. Yet in 1968 and 1972 the gallant ARVN, and local villagers, taking heavy casualties, thoroughly whipped two massive invasions. The press asserted Diem was persecuting 70-90% of the population, Buddhists. Actually, they were about 30%. Investigative reporter Marguerite Higgins and the U.N. proved Diem did not persecute Buddhists.

Hanoi was thrilled when JFK approved a coup that murdered Diem plunging Saigon into years of political chaos. Diem had been winning the war and some hearts and minds.

From 1954-1975, millions fled into the arms of Americans and anticommunists. Today millions of Americans run toward the lights and sounds of peace, social justice, progressivism, socialism and communism. Thank Burns and like propagandists.

Five Myths About the Vietnam War *Lan Cao*

Ken Burns and Lynn Novick say their multi-part PBS documentary about the Vietnam War, which concluded this past week, was intended to unpack a complex conflict and to embark upon the process of healing and reconciliation. The series has catapulted the Vietnam War back into the national consciousness. But despite thousands of books, articles and films about this moment in our history, there remain many deeply entrenched myths.

MYTH NO. 1: **The Viet Cong was a scrappy guerrilla force fighting a superpower.**

"Vastly superior in tools and techniques, and militarily dominant over much of the world," historian Ronald Aronson [wrote](#) about the hegemonic United States and the impudent rebels, "the Goliath sought to impose on David a peace favourable to his vision of the world." Recode recently [compared](#) the Viet Cong to Uber: "young, scrappy and hungry troops break rules and create new norms, shocking the enemy."

In reality, the Viet Cong, the pro-North force in South Vietnam, was armed by both North Vietnam — which [planned](#), controlled and directed Viet Cong campaigns in the South — and the Soviet Union. According to the CIA, from 1954 to 1968, communist nations (primarily the Soviet Union and China) [provided](#) the North with \$3.2 billion in military and economic aid, mostly coming after 1964 as the war accelerated. Other sources [suggest](#) the number was more than double that figure.

The Viet Cong had powerful and modern AK-47s, a Soviet-made automatic rifle that was the equivalent of the M-16 used by American troops. Its fighters were also [equipped](#) with submachine guns, grenades, rocket launchers and an array of other weapons. By contrast, the U.S. military gave the South Vietnamese armed forces old [World War II-era castoffs](#), such as M-1 rifles, until the late 1970s.

MYTH NO. 2: **The Vietnamese refugees who came to the United States represented the elite.**

As the Immigration Policy Center's Alicia Campi has [put it](#), the 130,000 Vietnamese who came to the United States at the end of the conflict "were generally high-skilled and well-educated" people. Sociologist Carl Bankston [described](#) this group as "the elite of South Vietnam."

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Five Myths About the Vietnam War...

Although the group that fled in 1975, referred to as the first wave, was more educated and middle-class, many who arrived through the U.S.-sponsored evacuation efforts were also people with close ties to the Americans in Vietnam whom Washington had promised to rescue. They were not necessarily “elite.” These [included](#) ordinary soldiers of South Vietnam as well as people who had worked as clerks or secretaries in the U.S. Embassy. The second wave of refugees who left Vietnam after 1975 numbered approximately 2 million. They came from rural areas and were often less educated. Most [escaped](#) on rickety wooden boats and became known as “boat people”; they deluged neighboring countries of “first asylum” — Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Indonesia — at a rate of 2,000 to 50,000 per month. More than 400,000 were [admitted](#) into the United States. The third wave of refugees, of which an estimated 159,000 [came](#) to the United States beginning in 1989, were offspring of American fathers and Vietnamese mothers, as well as political prisoners and those who had been put in “reeducation camps.”

MYTH NO. 3: The American fighting force in Vietnam relied on the draft.

Popular culture is rife with examples of poor and minority soldiers arriving in Vietnam via the draft and then dying. The idea runs through the heart of Robert Zemeckis’s “[Forrest Gump](#),” Tim O’Brien’s “[The Things They Carried](#)” and Michael Cimino’s “[The Deer Hunter](#),” among other movies and books. Vietnam was “the most blatant class war since the Civil War,” as James Fallows [put it](#) in his 1989 book “More Like Us.”

The facts show otherwise. [Findings](#) from the Report of the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force in February 1970 [show](#) that 78 percent of active-duty troops in 1965 were volunteers. Nor did the military rely primarily on disadvantaged citizens or African Americans. According to the commission’s report, African Americans “constituted only 12.7 percent of nearly 1.7 million enlisted men serving voluntarily in 1969.” Seventy-nine percent of troops had at least [a high school education](#) (compared with 63 percent of Korean War veterans and 45 percent of World War II veterans). And according to VFW Magazine, 50 percent were from middle-income backgrounds, and 88 percent were white (representing 86 percent of the deaths).

MYTH NO. 4: Communist forces breached the U.S. Embassy in Saigon during the Tet Offensive.

One of the most pivotal events of the Vietnam War was the attack by the Viet Cong on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in 1968. Retired ambassador David F. Lambertson, who served as a political officer there, [said](#) in one account that “it was a shock to American and world opinion. The attack on the Embassy, the single most powerful symbol [of U.S. presence] signaled that something was badly wrong in Vietnam. The Tet Offensive broke the back of American public opinion.” Early reports by the Associated Press said the Viet Cong had [occupied](#) the building.

UPI [claimed](#) that the fighters had taken over five floors.

In fact, communist forces had blasted a hole through an outer wall of the compound and hunkered down in a six-hour battle against U.S. and South Vietnamese forces. The embassy was never occupied, and the Viet Cong attackers were killed. The Tet Offensive’s other coordinated attacks by 60,000 enemy troops against South Vietnamese targets were [repelled](#). Don Oberdorfer, writing for Smithsonian Magazine, [observed](#) that Tet was a military disaster.

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Five Myths About the Vietnam War...

ter for the North, yet it was “a battlefield defeat that ultimately yielded victory” for the enemy.

In part, that was because the erroneous reports about the embassy assault were [searing and humiliating](#) to Americans, and no subsequent military victories during Tet could dislodge the powerful notion that the war effort was [doomed](#).

MYTH NO. 5: **South Vietnamese soldiers were unwilling and unable to fight.**

Some contend that the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), the South’s army, was not up to the job. Andy Walpole, formerly of Liverpool John Moores University, [wrote](#) that “they were [unwilling] to engage in combat with their guerrilla counterparts and were more interested in surviving than winning.” Harry F. Noyes, who served in Vietnam, [complained](#) about this widespread belief: “Everybody ‘knows’ they were incompetent, treacherous and cowardly.”

But those who fought alongside the ARVN tell a different story. Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, adviser to the South Vietnamese Airborne Division, [bemoaned](#) that “the sacrifice and valor and commitment of the South Vietnamese Army largely disappeared from the American political and media consciousness.” He wrote of the tenacious fighting spirit of those troops, particularly at the Battle of Dong Ha, where they were charged with supporting American Marine units. “In combat, the South Vietnamese refused to leave their own dead or wounded troopers on the field or abandon a weapon,” he [recalled](#).

South Vietnamese forces also fought off the surprise communist assaults on Saigon and elsewhere during the Tet Offensive of 1968. In August and September of that year, according to Gen. Creighton Abrams, commander of U.S. military operations from 1968 to 1972, “the ARVN killed more enemy than all other allied forces combined . . . [and] suffered more KIA, both actual and on the basis of the ratio of enemy to friendly killed in action,” because it received less air and other tactical support than U.S. forces. In March 1972, during the Easter Offensive, South Vietnamese forces, with American air support, also [prevailed](#) against a conventional enemy invasion consisting of 20 divisions. And in April 1975, the 18th Division [defending](#) Xuan Loc “held off massive attacks by an entire North Vietnamese Army corps,” according to one report. In the end, those soldiers had even more at stake than the Americans did.

Veterans Angry, Disappointed Following PBS' Vietnam War Documentary *Tatania Sanchez*

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/09/29/veterans-angry-disappointed-following-pbs-vietnam-war-documentary/>
9/29/2017

A gripping documentary on the Vietnam War — described by many viewers as a masterful depiction of a prolonged conflict that divided the nation — has left many American and Vietnamese veterans feeling deeply disappointed, even betrayed.

"The Vietnam War" — a 10-part, 18-hour PBS documentary by American filmmakers Ken Burns and Lynn Novick that concluded Thursday night — depicts the history of the war through photographs, archival footage and interviews with more than 80 veterans and witnesses from all sides. The film has been hailed as a hard-hitting, raw account of the war and the players involved.

But veterans of the South Vietnamese military say they were largely left out of the narrative, their voices drowned out by the film's focus on North Vietnam and its communist leader, Ho Chi Minh. And many American veterans say that the series had several glaring omissions and focused too much on leftist anti-war protesters and soldiers who came to oppose the war.

On Thursday evening, hours before the film's final installment aired, a group of American and South Vietnamese veterans came together at a San Jose home to share memories of the war and talk about the documentary. Sutton Vo, a former major in South Vietnam's army engineering corps, watched the series but has told friends and family not to do so. The film is "pure propaganda," he said.

"The Vietnam War included the Americans, South Vietnam and North Vietnam. But in the 18 hours, the role of South Vietnam was very small," said Vo, 80. "Any documentary should be fair and should tell the truth to the people."

After the war, Vo was sent to a communist "re-education" camp, where he was imprisoned for 13 years. At one point, he said, he was confined for three months to a pitch-black cell virtually 24 hours a day — his feet shackled and his hands bound with rubber string — after an escape attempt.

Despite South Vietnam's fall to the communists in 1975, he said, South Vietnamese soldiers did what they could with what little they had.

"We fought for our country with our best," Vo said. "We didn't need the Americans to do our job for us. We didn't need the American GIs to come and fight for us. We needed money, supplies and international support."

Like Vo, Cang Dong spent time in a re-education camp; he was freed in 1987. Dong, 70, president of the local chapter of Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America, has just started watching the series, but said he's unhappy with what he sees as the filmmakers' glorification of Ho.

"Everything is a big lie," he said. "To our people, Ho Chi Minh was a big liar and immoral."

Veteran Jim Barker, 70, of San Jose, also said he was surprised by the extent of coverage given to North Vietnamese soldiers in the film.

"What bothered me is the element of arrogance that seemed to come out in seeing themselves so superior. I had trouble with that," said Barker, who was an adviser with a South Vietnamese intelligence unit in the Central Highlands and survived the siege of Kontum in 1972. "That focus detracted attention from the people of South Vietnam and the idealism that was there."

In a recent [interview with New America Media](#), Novick acknowledged that historically the stories of South Vietnamese were simplified in the U.S. news media, which she said portrayed the South as "inept and corrupt."

"But the film has gone a long way to tell their stories, the heroism and the stories of personal sacrifice made by those on the losing side," she said.

Asked about criticism that stories were missing from the narrative, Burns in the same interview said he and Novick had to make "huge, painful decisions."

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Veterans Angry, Disappointed Following PBS' Vietnam War Documentary ...

"We cannot tell every story," Burns said. "Even if it were 180 hours, people would say, 'You left this out.' What you want to do is tell a story in which this Gold Star mother had to stand in for lots of Gold Star mothers, and this Saigon civilian has to stand in for many Saigon civilians, and this ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) marine has to stand in for many, many ARVN marines. But we feel that we put our arms around everything."

PBS did not immediately respond Friday to a request for comment.

Jack Wells, a retired lieutenant colonel of the U.S. Marine Corps who served in Vietnam in 1968 and 1969, called the documentary "a masterpiece of video and footage" in which he learned a number of things, but said he identified several omissions that bothered him.

He pointed to the film's depiction of Kim Phuc, "the Napalm girl" who became a famous symbol of the war after a 1972 photograph showed her running naked on a road with other children, her back severely burned by a South Vietnamese napalm attack. The film said Phuc left Vietnam and eventually moved to Canada but didn't mention that she had requested political asylum from the Vietnamese communists, who had used her as a propaganda symbol, Wells said.

The documentary had serious biases, the 73-year-old Cupertino resident said.

"If they had an anti-war protester, they didn't seem to give the same amount of time to someone who wasn't a protester or someone who saw humanitarian treatment of the enemy," Wells said.

Barker agreed. "A lot of us have a tremendous sense of pride for what we attempted to do and defend," he said.

Beth Nguyen, an author and a graduate professor at the University of San Francisco, arrived as a baby in the U.S. from Vietnam in 1975 after her family escaped by boat. The family settled in Michigan.

"I grew up knowing about the war in the same way that most Americans grew up learning about the war, which was through movies or books," said Nguyen, 43. "Mostly every movie is done by a white man. And this documentary is sort of the same perspective."

Nguyen said she also felt the film diminished the voices of South Vietnam, which she said was "expected and disappointing."

"America was divided by the war," she said. "American pain and suffering is something I feel is important to discuss and think about, but it should not come at the expense of Vietnamese pain and suffering, which is what usually happens."

The documentary took on a different meaning for 54-year-old Andrew Lam, whose father, a former lieutenant general for the South Vietnamese army, was featured throughout the documentary.

Lam, a Fremont resident who grew up in Milpitas, was the journalist who interviewed Novick as well as Burns earlier this month for New America Media, a multimedia ethnic news agency based in San Francisco.

The film brought out emotions in his father, 86-year-old Thi Quang Lam, that he had never seen growing up, he said.

"It was very emotional, because I knew the events, but I never knew how he felt," Lam said.

A pivotal moment in the film came when his father was asked to describe how he felt when the ship he was traveling on toward the Philippines — where he would ask for political asylum — asked Lam and fellow vets to take down the South Vietnamese flag that had been hanging from the ship.

"I could hear the cry in his voice, which to me was a shock because my father was a general," Lam said. "We didn't talk about how we felt."

Comments by Hoi B. Tran

– Oct 1, 2017

It is no secret that the Viet Nam War was the most controversial and misunderstood war that the U.S was involved in. It was a war that deeply and bitterly divided the America. It was also a war that U.S veterans were denigrated and mistreated when returning home from Viet Nam after their tour of duty. I remember that the late U.S Pres. Richard M. Nixon said in his book **No More Vietnams** published in 1985 as follows, and I quote: *No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Viet Nam War. It was misrepresented then, and it is misremembered now. Rarely have so many people been so wrong about so much. Never have the consequences of their misunderstanding been so tragic.* End of quote.

As a soldier, I fought in both Viet Nam wars. From the Dien Bien Phu battle in the North to the long war in the South in various capacities. Now as a living witness, I feel compelled to refute the shameless lie by this Viet Nam War series when they praised and glorified Ho Chi Minh as a dedicated nationalist patriot. Additionally, I also want to erase the unjust stains smeared upon the U.S military annals by the bold-faced Vietnamese communist propaganda machine in North Viet Nam stupidly backed by the ignorant, left leaning news media and film makers in the U.S.

1 – Was Ho Chi Minh a true Vietnamese nationalist patriot who fought and ousted the French & restored independence for VN?

On March 9th, 1945 Japanese Imperial forces in North Viet Nam staged a coup d'état and ousted the French Colonists, not Ho Chi Minh. The following day a Japanese envoy met Emperor Bao Dai and granted Viet Nam her independence within Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Following this joyful event, Emperor Bao Dai appointed Prof. Tran Trong Kim to form a legitimate government. While the Vietnamese were enjoying their independence, the US dropped two atom bombs on Hiroshima & Nagasaki in early August 1945 forcing Japan to surrender to the Allied forces unconditionally on August 14, 1945. The capitulation of Japan created a political chaos in North Viet Nam. Ho Chi Minh promptly exploited the chaotic situation and used his armed propaganda units embedded in Ha Noi to seize power. On Aug 28, 1945, he formally declared the country to be the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRV), an independent nation & proclaimed himself President and Minister of Foreign Affairs concurrently. The following week, he had his cadres convened a meeting at the Ba Dinh Square to introduce his government and cited the Declaration of Independence. During this time I was a naïve 10 year-old Vanguard Youth Troop in Ha Noi, North Viet Nam. Along with my group I was very happy singing patriotic songs as indoctrinated by communist cadres to praise Ho Chi Minh in many events.

After becoming President of the DRV, Ho showed his true colors as a vicious communist and a boldfaced traitor. Ho overzealously followed Maoist's doctrine and launched the inhumane Land Reform Campaign that slaughtered at least from 60,000 to 150,000 landowners that they labeled as wicked landlords and about 50,000 to 100,000 were imprisoned. And with his death squads, Ho liquidated all political opponents if these people were nationalists or non-communist patriots.

The above facts shows that Ho Chi Minh and his ragtag militia forces, the Viet Minh, and his so-called armed propaganda units in North Viet Nam contributed absolutely nothing in expelling of the French forces from Viet Nam and to end French colonial rule in 1945.

2 – Ho Chi Minh was a traitor, a treacherous egomaniac, not a patriot!

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A few months after extorting power from Tran Trong Kim government Ho showed his traitorous, egoistic character. On March 6, 1946, Ho compromised and signed an agreement allowing French forces to return to Viet Nam for five years and, in return France would recognize his DRV government.

Through this wily move, nationalist Vietnamese people considered Ho a traitor to the cause of revolution. If Ho Chi Minh did not sign that agreement, of course, French forces were not allowed to return to North Viet Nam. If French forces were not in Viet Nam, there would have been no Dien Bien Phu battle in 1954 and Viet Nam was not divided at the 17th parallel after Ho's forces, the Viet Minh, defeated French forces at Dien Bien Phu garrison. The fall of Dien Bien Phu garrison was because Gen. Henri Navarre, Commander in Chief of the French Expeditionary Forces in the Indochinese Theater, was not aware that the ragtag Viet Minh forces received two hundred heavy artillery pieces and the deadly Soviet built rocket launchers "Stalin Organs", military advisors, technicians, gunners and troops from the PRC.

The reason Ho Chi Minh received substantial military supplies and manpower from the PRC was because Ho kow-towed to Mao Zedong since Mao won the war and established the PRC in mainland China in October of 1949. Ho Chi Minh wasted no time and immediately sent his representatives to China asking for support and assistance. By January 1950, the PRC and Russia recognized Ho's government and the PRC began to help Ho with military advisors, weapons and troops to ensure their satellite in Viet Nam would survive..

The bottom line is: If Ho Chi Minh had been a true nationalist patriot, he should have contented with the independence that Viet Nam inherited bloodlessly at the departure of the Japanese after they were defeated by the US. Ho must have known that he was very lucky to be at the right place at the right time to, all of a sudden, become president of the DRV. Under the circumstances, he should live peacefully in North Viet Nam and committed all resources into rebuilding the war ravaged country as well as the dying economy in North Viet Nam at the time. He must have known that if he did not allow French forces to return to North Viet Nam, there was no Dien Bien Phu battle. Without the Dien Bien Phu battle, Viet Nam was not divided at the 17th parallel. Even after Viet Nam was divided, if he had a decent conscience, he should have recognized the RVN in the South as a separate, independent country like East and West Germany or North and South Korea. He should not be too egoistic, too greedy wanting to gobble up the South to satisfy his hegemonic dream. But as a devout communist and a power-hungry man, Ho Chi Minh fervently wanted to take over the South and place it under his control to satisfy his big patrons, the PRC and Russia.

3 - Sullied the United States and the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN).

During the war to conquer the RVN, Ho Chi Minh and the apparatchiks in North Viet Nam employed this motto incessantly on their propaganda machine to push people to go to war: *"Fighting the Americans to save our country"* and *"Liberate our people in the South from the neo-colonial rule of the American Imperialist"*. They smeared the RVN government and its Armed Forces as puppets or servants of the "American Imperialists." They always portrayed the RVN government as a despotic and corrupt regime and the U.S as imperialist. In summary, the North Vietnamese communist leadership had endlessly tried their utmost best to vituperate, sully the U.S, the RVN and people in the South.

Fortunately, history has eyes and time has certain way to bring truth to the surface. Although the long overdue truth could not heal the profound psychological and physical wound the RVN and her ally, the U.S had to suffer. But the truth did prove that the RVN and the U.S were not as bad as propagated by the com-

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Comments by Hoi B. Tran...

munist and distorted by the liberal U.S. news media and film makers.

Only a few years in the post-war era, the world had a better understanding and a clearer judgment about the ability to govern, the morality and virtue of the North Vietnamese communists after they dropped their mask and exposed their true evil color. After the end of the war they could not survive with their communist doctrine and their dying economy and they shamelessly begged the "American Imperialists" for help. At the present time in shopping malls, travel agencies, restaurants and hotels in Viet Nam most advertising signs are written in English, not in Chinese or Russian. In Viet Nam, girls and boys everywhere, from the metropolitan area to the rural countryside, are mixing in their day to day conversation with the words OK and Bye-Bye to be in vogue. They also celebrate Valentine Day and sing Happy Birthday in English to be fashionable.

The communist propaganda machine and the left leaning U.S news media always accused the former RVN as a corrupt regime. To be fair and honest, no one could deny that every country on this planet earth does have certain form of corruption. But if we compare the corruption between the former RVN and the communist party members and their cronies in the post-war years, the RVN appears amateurish. The communist party members are much more skillful in bringing corruption up multifold through foreign aid and investments, kickbacks from newly authorized businesses and land expropriation! They are much better than the RVN in that they invented the super human trafficking networks. Under the skillful management of the communist regime, Viet Nam is now known as the largest source of providing girls and women to neighboring countries as sex slaves. They sneered at the culture, all form of literary arts, books and music in the South as depraved and were aggressively scouring everywhere to confiscate these materials to discard and destroy them. Sadly, after they took over the South, morality, good old Vietnamese traditions and virtues went into extinction! Prostitution, pornographic materials, venereal diseases, HIV and drugs went rampant in this amoral, depraved society! Communist members are no longer poor communists. They have all become Red Capitalist! These Red Capitalists and their children are living an ultra-luxurious life over their miserable and poor people in Viet Nam. Never in the former RVN did I see politicians and high-ranking generals have multi-million dollar mansion or vacation houses like today's Red Capitalists. Never did I see children of high-ranking officials of the RVN driving cars that even in the U.S. only some affluent people could afford like Rolls Royces, Ferraris and Maseratis! Just out of curiosity, I was wondering where are those journalists of the 1960 era? Why don't they come out to criticize the current cruel communist dictators, the corrupt and immoral Red capitalists like they did during the Ngo Dinh Diem or Nguyen Van Thieu government? Where have these hypocrites been hiding?

Now, as a veteran of the former RVN who partook in the war, I want to say it clear to all my Vietnamese and American brothers-in-arms that the U.S were never defeated militarily by the ragtag army of the North Vietnamese Communist. Through political negotiation in Paris our politicians settled with major world powers and the parties involved to end the war in Viet Nam politically. Following orders, you must withdraw from Viet Nam. The last U.S. military unit left Viet Nam in March 1973. The final collapse of the RVN occurred on April 30, 1975. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the U.S. did not lose the war in Vietnam militarily. You have fulfilled the call of duty admirably and you have fought gallantly. We salute you. We thank you for your service and for helping us in Viet Nam. Ironically, politics dictated the outcome. Don't be bothered; only ignorant or misled individuals would buy into the notion that America lost the war in Viet Nam militarily. I clearly remember President Richard M. Nixon had said in his November 3, 1969 speech about the Vietnamization of the war: "Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that." I cannot agree more with the late President.

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It is outrageous to see some unconscionable people who reaped benefits and opportunities America afforded them to become rich and famous, yet for one reason or another they turned anti American. To these sick people, everything America does is wrong and the enemy is always right. The last advice I wish to convey to my younger generation is: ***“Never trust the Vietnamese Communists”***!!! They have been proven to be evils of the worst kind all through the last half of the 20th Century until the present! They have changed their name from the Vietnamese Communist Party to the Vietnamese Workers Party and from the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. They have transformed from poor peasants before 1975 to multi-millionaires and billionaires through plundering and stealing after April 30, 1975. In the bottom of their soul, they have not changed. They are still the inhumane, immoral, deceptive, dangerous, cruel and unpredictable communists. Don't ever trust or believe them regardless of how sweet or conciliatory they try to convince you.

