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Military Journalism

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Mr. Brian Lamb
C-SPAN
400 N. Capitol St., N.W. #650
Washington, DC 20001

O-BR

Dear Mr. Lamb:

I was not able to listen to all of the McNamara interview, nor all of the discussion this morning. I was struck by what I did hear, however, by the absence of any mention of the work of Hanson W. Baldwin, then at least nominally Military Editor of The New York Times, and of Marguerite Higgins.

Mr. McNamara's emotional response to your line of questioning in the latter part of the interview as concerns Ho Chi Minh' dedication to international, in contrast to national Communism reminded me of how he shut off a similar line of questioning from the late Clark Mollenhoff. Forced to call a press conference to deal with Baldwin's published criticism, in re. the Stennis hearings, McNamara flew into a rage on national television when Mollenhoff began to sense the lie documented on pages 129-30 of the book described in the accompanying announcement. McNamara ordered Mollenhoff out of the room. He so dominated the Pentagon press corps, in large part because of the support for McNamara by their bosses, that they all sat their meekly when they all should have got up and walked out.

Mr. McNamara's emotional response last night just as effectively blunted your line of questioning. That, it seemed to me, was about to lead to Ho Chi Minh's last will and testament in which he proclaimed his total dedication to the international Communist cause.

Documentation for Arthur Sylvester's declaration of a "right to lie" is provided in endnote #11 on page 105. Much of the theme of the book is documentation of how, once government begins to operate on that claim, the "right to lie" becomes routine.

To a considerable extent, the book is based on research I conducted for a U.S. Army study of what went wrong in Vietnam while working at the Army War College, 1977-79. Hanson Baldwin, by then retired, made available to me the large trove of internal N.Y. Times documents he had deposited at the Sterling Library, Yale University, supplemented by his oral history interviews at the U.S. Naval Institute, and by extensive personal interviews with me during and following my examination of the written and oral history sources. I also did a careful reading of the papers Marguerite Higgins bequeathed to Syracuse University.

In short, no one who followed the reporting by Higgins, 1961 until her death, and Baldwin's throughout the McNamara tenure should have had any doubt that we were headed for disaster.

Neil Sheehan, by the way, was a participant in the War College study. He was sent a review draft of the final report and included in a panel discussion of that report at the War College. He challenged nothing of the statements of fact documented by the report as published as "Press Coverage of the Vietnam War: The Third View," U.S. Army War College, May, 1979. That report cited the overthrow and murder of President Diem as the decisive event leading to disaster, as Higgins had predicted and Baldwin later came to believe. Sheehan, of course, was a major participant in the campaign that led to President Diem's murder.

Now Mr. McNamara has come to essentially the same conclusion as concerns the anti-Diem coup, which, to his credit, he opposed at the time.

Col. Harry G. Summers, Jr., was to have included the press study, as above, in the report he was assigned to write on the Army study, published as On Strategy. In his search for post-retirement employment by the press, he deemed it wise to exclude any such criticism of the press. That is discussed, with documentation, on pages 111-114, as is the use the press made of On Strategy to declare itself absolved of all blame.

Mr. McNamara has followed the lead of Robert Kennedy in attempting to blame the Vietnam debacle on the South Vietnamese. Almost invariably, Mr. Karnow and others seeking to absolve the press by blaming the South Vietnamese cite the Battle of Ap Bac in January, 1963. As concerns the distorted, indeed, false Halberstam (and Sheehan-Arnett) reporting of that battle, you should read the first-hand observations of then Lt. Col. Andrew P. O'Meara in an appendix to the May, 1979, Army War College press sub-study.

Is the press, once again, going to get away with shifting the blame to everyone but themselves?

Sincerely,