

effects of leaders' personalities and the bewildering command relationships that generated a great deal of self-inflicted friction for the South Atlantic Task Force. For readers of Adm Sandy Woodward's *One Hundred Days* (an excellent—if one-sided—book, which is on the Commandant's Reading List), *Amphibious Assault Falklands* provides an essential counterbalance. Indeed, the tension between these two particular stories highlights the trained historian's dictum that one can rarely, if ever, discern the truth about an event from a single firsthand account.

On the negative side, the book's map coverage is a bit disappointing. Indeed, the only map provided is a sparsely annotated, small-scale representation of the Falkland Islands that appears in the end papers. The reader will

benefit by having some additional maps at hand, such as an operational scale depiction of the area between the Argentine mainland and South Georgia and a strategic scale map of the Atlantic on which one can examine the "big picture," including the spatial relationships between the British Isles, the intermediate staging base at Ascension Island, and the South Atlantic theater of operations.

Amphibious Assault Falklands has much to offer Marines as a description of warfare under circumstances very similar to those which U.S. forces might face in early 21st century conflicts: a "downsized" military confronting an unanticipated mission in a region where there is no host nation support. The authors explore the challenges these circumstances posed for U.K. military

forces, focusing primarily on amphibious power projection, and distilling many lessons that are relevant for us as we develop the capabilities that will enable OMFTS. U.K. forces encountered many difficulties, to be sure, but they nonetheless prevailed in a theater of operations that was 8,000 miles from home, but right in their adversary's back yard. This book describes how this somewhat unlikely victory was crafted through the courage, endurance, and talent of a thoroughly professional military force led by commanders who weighed and accepted grave risks. This is the critical learning objective of the book and a lesson that should not be lost on our own Naval Service.

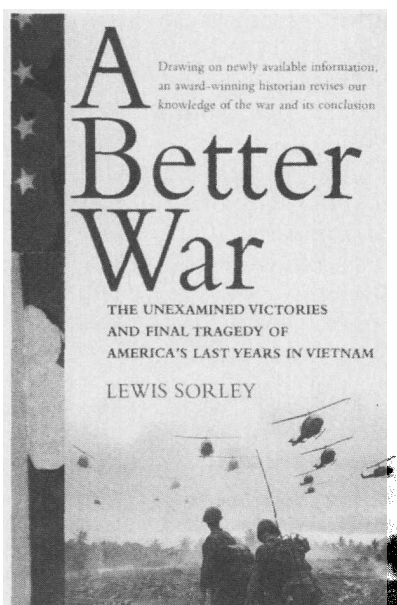
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Misinformed About the Vietnam War

reviewed by Robert Previdi

A BETTER WAR: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam. By Lewis Sorley. Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, 1999, 507 pp., \$28.00. (Member \$25.20)



It doesn't matter whether you served in Vietnam or how many books you've read on the subject, this book is essential reading. And for members of the Marine Corps, it is an excellent military case study. There is much new information and perspective in this well-thought-out, clearly written book.

Lewis Sorley, a West Point graduate who spent 20 years in the U.S. Army, has written a superb book that focuses primarily on the second half of the war, starting in 1968 when GEN Creighton W. Abrams replaced GEN William C. Westmoreland. After reading this book, it is hard to understand how GEN Westmoreland was allowed to remain in command for so long (20

June 1964 to mid-1968). The fact that Johnson and McNamara allowed this to happen may be one of the greater mistakes of the war.

We can only wonder what might have happened if GEN Abrams or a Marine general, such as Victor H. Krulak, was in command from 1964. The Westmoreland "search and destroy" strategy was the wrong one to follow. The reality is that the enemy had more troops available than the United States, and their troops could fight indefinitely with no political consequences. Here is what Gen Krulak wrote in a memorandum to McNamara:

We must not engage in an attritional contest with the hardcore just for the sake of attrition; nor should we react to Viet Cong initiatives or seek them out just to do battle. The attritional ratio under these circumstances is not going to favor us, and this form of competition has little to do with who ultimately wins anyhow.

In his book on Vietnam, McNamara claims that his decisionmaking was hampered by a lack of accurate information and analysis. The Krulak memorandum, a sensible and informed strategic document, proves him wrong.

Lewis Sorley explains in detail how Abrams changed the overall strategy from the unwise "search and destroy" to the more effective "clear and hold" operations. Abrams, like Krulak, understood fully that the real battlefield was the villages and hamlets of South Vietnam, not places like Khe Sanh where, for no purpose, we squandered many brave Marines. This is what happens when the Commander in Chief, the Secretary of Defense, and the field commander are fighting the wrong war.

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Abrams thought that the correct measure of success was "population security," not the famous McNamara "body count." According to Sorley, the combination of Abrams, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, and Central Intelligence Agency expert William Colby succeeded with the pacification program to an extent never understood by the American people. According to Colby, "By 1972 the pacification program had essentially eliminated the guerrilla problem in most of the country."

What this book reveals is the degree to which the South Vietnamese had taken over the ground war from the Americans. What's new to most Americans is that they were winning the war until we pulled the plug on airpower and supplies. Most Americans believe that we lost the war when the American ground forces left—according to Sorley, this was not the case.

Military people are often lectured about the need for civilian control of the military. The corollary question is, what does the military do when the civilians in the executive branch don't know what it takes to run a war? The answer is that Congress must understand the situation and get involved. Unfortu-

nately, it abandoned our troops on the battlefield.

Sorley makes the same point as H.R. McMaster in his book, *Dereliction of Duty* that, through legislation the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) were taken out of the chain of command. Nobody had to take them seriously. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 reinforces this poorly thought-out command structure.

According to Sorley the situation got so bad that JCS chairmen GEN Earle G. Wheeler and Adm Thomas H. Moorer "had virtually no influence on the conduct of the war." In addition, Sorley writes that regarding such operations as our incursions into Laos and Cambodia, Gen Bruce Palmer, Jr., observed that Henry Kissinger "became for all intents and purposes the de facto Chairman of the JCS."

Sorley shows the severe casualties we inflicted upon the enemy in 1968. There were 42,000 enemy killed at Tet, followed by another 40,000 during the mini-Tet attack in May. Another 26,000 in the Third Offensive in August, plus another 53,200 lost in the final quarter of 1968. This totals a staggering 161,200 enemy troops killed in 1968 alone. By comparison, the Allies lost 38,684.

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I'm sure these facts were unknown to most Americans. The American press failed to accurately report the situation in Vietnam. The press, including an icon like

Walter Cronkite, ended up tailoring their coverage to favor the viewpoint of the protesters, not what brave Americans were achieving on the battlefield.

The final years of the war included extremely poor decisionmaking by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. When Nixon took office, he continued LBJ's halt on bombing and decided against mining the harbors, thereby losing the advantages already achieved on the battlefield.

Later, we had great success when Nixon resumed the bombing and mined the harbors, but it was too late. Nixon said later that "if we had done that then, I think we would have ended the war in Vietnam in

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1969 rather than in 1973. That was my biggest mistake as President." He might have added that we would have won the war and saved South Vietnam.

Mr. Sorley shows how the United States, led by Congress, abandoned South Vietnam in 1975 by cutting off aid. That is why we lost this war, thereby wasting 58,000 American and 275,000 South Vietnamese lives. To realize that we gave the war away is sad and proves again that the words of American politicians can rarely be trusted.

The best way to honor all of those brave Americans and South Vietnamese who served in Vietnam is to read this book and to discuss it with your associates.

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>Mr. Previdi writes extensively on military issues and wrote the first book on the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols legislation, called *Civilian Control vs. Military Rule*.