

portray America as a simple mirror image of the USSR in its international role (except that today the Soviet Union is said to try just that little bit harder for "peace"). Still, I do not believe that Orwell would be a "peacenik" in 1985. He was quite straightforward about his attitude to such people; he considered them *de facto* allies of Nazism, and there is no doubt in my mind that he would see them that way now, with Nazism replaced by the left-wing fascism of the Soviet regime and its clients.

I reckon too that he would despise utterly the current humbug, journalistic cheating, and political double standards used in discussing Communism both in Europe and in other places like the Caribbean, Africa, and Central America. He would certainly remark that this comes not just from the vicious, the stupid, and the hypocrites on the "liberal" left, but from the smug and the supercilious on the deliquescent right, especially in Britain.<sup>1</sup> But I do not think that he would be discouraged by the waffle, the intellectual swindling and the fellow-traveling *Schweineri* today, which are so exactly like those of his own time. He would oppose them with the same courage, the same honesty, and the same keen (alas, not lethal) weapons he wielded when he was alive.

<sup>1</sup>See Peregrine Worsthorne's "Tory Critique of Neoconservatives" in the October 1985 *American Spectator*. The tone and content are like nothing so much as those of a (London) *Times* editorial on Germany, vintage 1937-38.

In defense of W.J. West and his eccentric labors, it ought to be said that he is, after all, helping to keep alive the memory of George Orwell and his lonely battle against our apologists for

political cruelty and oppression. Whatever the value of West's book in the academic game, that reminder should give it a place on the public stage. □

## THE RISE AND FALL OF AN AMERICAN ARMY: U.S. GROUND FORCES IN VIETNAM, 1965-1973

Shelby L. Stanton/Presidio Press/\$22.50

Fred Barnes

The biggest tourist attraction in Washington these days isn't the White House or the Jefferson Memorial or the Washington Monument or even the hulking John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on the bank of the Potomac River. It's the Vietnam Memorial, which isn't large or beautiful or especially interesting to look at. It consists of two walls of stone, stuck together in a V shape, and filled with the names of the 50,000 or so American soldiers who died in the Vietnam war. The monument is embedded in the ground on the fringe of the Mall, and there is practically nowhere nearby to park. Yet that doesn't keep people away. Day after

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day, crowds gather in long lines to walk past the stark walls and gaze at the names of the Vietnam dead. Why do they come? My guess is that they want to make up for something that went terribly wrong, namely the American intervention in Vietnam. Not that American involvement itself was wrong. Not that the soldiers fought poorly. I suspect most pilgrims to the memorial figure America acted morally in intervening, then erred badly in pursuing the war effort, for whatever reason. And they want to express solidarity with the brave victims of that flawed policy, the war dead.

*The Rise and Fall of an American Army*, Shelby Stanton's remarkable battlefield history of American soldiers in Vietnam, provides fresh confirmation that the public's instinct is correct. Indeed, as Stanton points out in accounts of battle after battle, American troops fought with incredible courage, frequently in face-to-face clashes in which they had to resort to knives or bayonets or shovels to combat Viet Cong or North Vietnamese troops. In fact, they had all but won the war by 1969, when the pivotal change in policy came. The war was Vietnamized. American troops were gradually withdrawn from combat operations, then from Vietnam altogether. The fighting was handed over to South Vietnamese forces, who weren't ready for the task, and Indochina was lost.

It didn't have to happen that way, and Stanton points out many of the tragic mistakes. The most obvious, of course, was the decision to bar American troops from wiping out Communist sanctuaries and supply depots in Cambodia. This, Stanton writes, meant that full victory, in the conventional military sense, was impossible. Then, there was the unwillingness to call up Reserve and National Guard units for fear of public backlash. This caused critical personnel shortages in Vietnam, Stanton

notes. And there was also the refusal, out of concern over mounting American casualties, to pursue the decimated Viet Cong relentlessly after the abortive Tet offensive in 1968. "This command desire to cut further losses inhibited any chance of a ruthless follow-up campaign aimed at finishing off the VC remnants and discouraging future NVA [North Vietnamese Army] activity in South Vietnam," says Stanton. The biggest mistake, he suggests, was turning military duties over to the South Vietnamese. "This crash program to mold the South Vietnamese military overnight into an image of the self-sufficient, highly technical U.S. armed forces was doomed to failure," he writes. Nevertheless, "Vietnamization proceeded at a breakneck pace [from 1969 on], and the South Vietnamese Army was abandoned before it had a chance to properly assimilate American equipment and military doctrine." At the same time, the morale of U.S. troops sagged dramatically once they were pulled from offensive combat missions.

In the end, Stanton says bluntly, the American army in Vietnam was allowed to unravel. "The magnificent courage and fighting spirit of the thousands of riflemen, aircraft and armored crewmen, cannoneers, engineers, signalmen, and service personnel could not overcome the fatal handicaps of faulty campaign strategy, incomplete wartime preparation, and the tardy, superficial attempts at Vietnamization. An entire American army was sacrificed on the battlefield of Vietnam. When the war was finally over, the United States military had to build a new volunteer army from the smallest shreds of its tattered remnants."

It isn't Stanton's analysis of the causes of defeat in Vietnam, however, that makes his book unique. Rather, it is his account, year by year from 1965 to 1973, of the actual fighting on the ground. The war, as Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr. argued persuasively in *On Strategy*, was not between well-equipped Americans and Viet Cong guerrillas who wore black pajamas and straw hats and were expert only at setting booby traps. By 1965, Stanton writes, "the war of liberation in Vietnam was no longer a squabble between midnight partisans and colonial police. Both North Vietnamese and United States armed forces represented excellently equipped, professional modern armies." What Stanton captures vividly is the ferocity of the fighting. At times, his descriptions make you think he's writing about the bloody front in World War I. Take this account of a battle in the Central Highlands in 1967:

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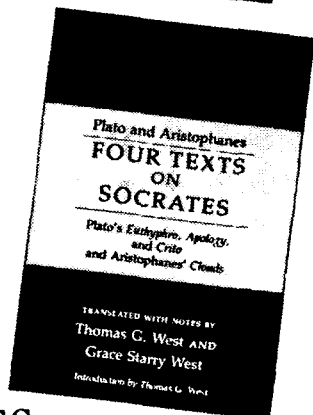
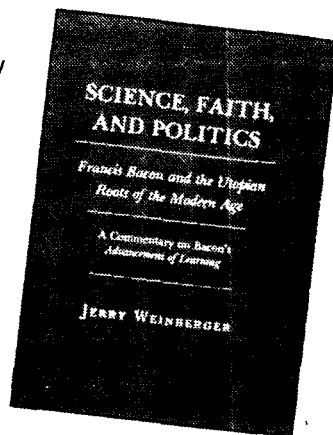
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Hand-to-hand combat, rocket and grenade blasts, and clattering automatic weapons filled the bamboo thickets and shrub brush. . . . All night long the two [American] companies were raked by NVA heavy weapons. Ammunition was air-dropped into a large bomb crater near the position's center by helicopters, which were guided in by flashlight. Both sides tried to recover their wounded comrades from the fringes of the battle line, and more dead were added in the thin space separating the two forces. No flares were fired for fear of silhouetting positions. At dawn the NVA withdrew. The fighting had been so intense that one log was found in the morning with six dead paratroopers on one side and four dead NVA soldiers sprawled out on the other side. At the end of the log were two more NVA, one of them an officer who still clutched a captured M16 rifle taken from one of the Americans.

Such fierce fighting was commonplace in Vietnam. In 1965, for instance, an infantry battalion was ambushed by the Viet Cong near Saigon. "Reinforcements were impossible; there were too

few helicopters to fly them in," writes Stanton, a former Army captain who was wounded in Laos during the war. "Soldiers grappled in hand-to-hand combat, swinging axes and entrenching tools as ammunition ran out."

The message in all this is that the American military can still fight. Even young and inexperienced soldiers proved to be tough. When the need for helicopter pilots grew desperate, the Army turned to troops still in the late stages of their initial training. "To the Army's surprise, these young soldiers—who often possessed no college background or career aspirations, but only the desire to fly—proved to be just the answer," Stanton says. "Full of zeal, and bold to the point of recklessness, young and unmarried, they became the best helicopter pilots in the business." Too bad their superiors in Washington weren't a little bold and reckless, too. □

Americans, many of them businessmen in peacetime, rebuilt and reorganized French port facilities and railroads. A supply force headed by Charles Dawes accomplished miracles. There remained confusion and inefficiency aplenty, but the whole of the accomplishment was greater than the sum of its parts.

Its organizer in large measure was Major General Peyton C. March, one of a handful of truly able, decisive general officers in the U.S. Army at the beginning of the war. Recalled from France in early 1918 to become Army Chief of Staff, March relentlessly purged incompetents from the military bureaucracy, gave it a new sense of purpose, and quite possibly provided the margin of victory. His reward was typical of military organizers whose post of duty is far from the front lines. The nation heaped honors, including the unprecedented rank of General of the Armies, on the Commander of the American Expeditionary Force, John J. Pershing. March went into retirement

and died barely remembered in 1956.

Pershing himself receives generally deserved accolades from Professor Ferrell for his management of the American army in France, especially his refusal to disperse it among units of the French army. Nonetheless, the author leaves one with questions about Pershing's grasp of the sort of war he was fighting: "The AEF was not well prepared for gas war. It possessed almost no understanding of tanks, and had few. . . . If Pershing recognized that machine guns often proved decisive, he believed his troops could rush them with acceptable loss of life. . . . He placed his trust in individual marksmanship."

But at least Pershing understood that offensive action was necessary for victory. His French and British counterparts were hardly as flexible. In September 1918, American and French forces won an unexpectedly easy vic-

## WOODROW WILSON AND WORLD WAR I, 1917-1921

Robert H. Ferrell/Harper & Row/\$19.95

Alonzo L. Hamby

Both the intelligent reading public and the harried graduate student in American history have long needed a readable, scholarly account of Woodrow Wilson's last four years as President. Robert Ferrell's latest book, a fine study of a period that changed the world, fills that requirement very well. Two themes stand out in his account: The awesome power of an aroused democracy and the tragic disintegration of a great, if flawed, President.

The author devotes only passing attention to the circumstances that impelled the United States to declare war on Germany and its allies in April 1917. It is clear, however, that the issue had passed beyond the realm of choice. The German government had served notice that it would wage indiscriminate submarine warfare against any American shipping bound for Great Britain or France. The immediate alternative to war was to hand over control of American commerce to the Kaiser's government. The long-range alternative, given that such a course would

surely lead to the defeat of the Allies, would be to accept the loss of the protective shield that the British navy long had provided and to live in a world dominated by an expansionist military power. It is remarkable that the President waited until several American merchant ships had been sent under before he requested a declaration of war, and nearly incomprehensible that fifty congressmen and six senators voted against it.

At the time, Germany's announcement seemed a splendid example of Teutonic rationalism. It would lead to war, but the United States appeared to be in no position to make a decisive contribution to the nearly exhausted Allies. Its army was even smaller than Portugal's and ridden with deadwood at the top. Germany estimated that it would take the U.S. at least a year and a half to raise a force capable of having any impact on the European war—assuming its troops survived the submarine gauntlet. By then the Allies would have been forced to surrender.

What happened instead was that the U.S. put two million men under arms, transported them to France with insignificant losses, and began to make a difference as early as mid-1918.

Alonzo L. Hamby is professor of history at Ohio University and author, most recently, of *Liberalism and Its Challengers*.

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