

Low-Intensity Warfare: Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency, and Antiterrorism in the Eighties
 Edited by Michael T. Klare and Peter Kornbluh, Pantheon Books
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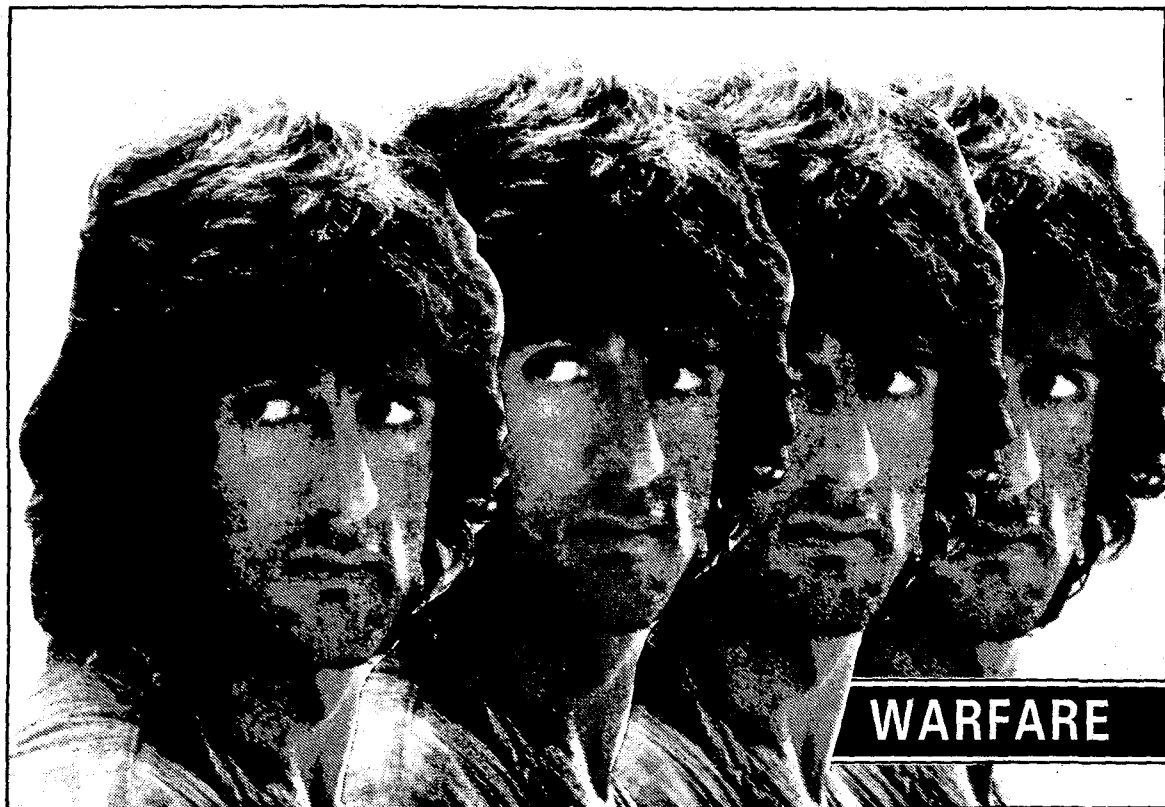
By Karl Bermann

THE YEAR IS 1962. AN ARMY ROTC instructor lectures to a class of military academy cadets, this writer among them, on the newly created Special Forces. These "Green Berets," he says, will play a pivotal role in wiping out Viet Cong guerrillas in South Vietnam, the latest domino to totter before the Red Tide. He demonstrates how to garrote a VC with piano wire. The enemy will not be able to replace his cadres, who are now dropping like flies in our collective imagination: "we" are building an electronic "fence" to detect any movement of men or materiel from North Vietnam. The class is awestruck at such devilishly clever invincibility. Here, surely, is the wave of the future. It's counterinsurgency—where the medieval meets high tech at the fringes of John F. Kennedy's New Frontier.

Then comes the rude awakening. The protracted and agonizing defeat of cold war liberalism in Vietnam and massive public opposition to foreign military adventures. It is a period of tactical retreat for the watchdogs of the empire, the proponents of global force projection.

But now it's the '80s. To the throwback regime in Washington, the specter of the Red Menace looms larger than ever. The Reaganites see the bear's paw wherever some Third World nation thumbs its nose at Uncle Sam. But they will "stand tall," drawing the line in El Salvador and elsewhere, just as JFK's counterinsurgents sought to do. More than that, they will take the offensive and "roll back" the red stain spreading across their maps—in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Angola, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Grenada. And they will strike back at communist-inspired terrorists and drug dealers wherever they threaten our interests.

Third World arena: Seeing the Third World, not Central Europe, as the primary arena of East-West confrontation today, Reagan regime military planners have pulled together the disparate age-old



War: names have been changed to protect the guilty

strategies and tactics of unconventional warfare—with a few innovations—under what they tout as a unified and cohesive doctrine of "low-intensity conflict."

In the national security establishment's Orwellian bureaucratized term derives from the classification of armed conflicts in three tiers: high-intensity (World War III), medium-intensity (the Iran-Iraq war), and low-intensity—a catch-all for just about anything else, from the protracted contra war to stationing Marines in Lebanon in 1983 to the *Achille Lauro* incident. For the Reaganites, low-intensity warfare is not just the right stuff to meet the current challenge to the empire. With its emphasis on the use of surrogates and, when indicated, the rapid and overwhelming application of U.S. power, low-intensity warfare is also the prescription to cure the Vietnam syndrome.

A panel of experts scrutinizes the theory and practice of low-intensity conflict in a new book edited by Michael T. Klare and Peter Kornbluh,

Low-Intensity Warfare: Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency, and Antiterrorism in the Eighties. Individual contributors review the Vietnam experience, the Reagan administration's "interventionist impulse," the nature of the low-intensity buildup, and the strategy's application to particular situations. An excellent chapter on Afghanistan by Selig S. Harrison sheds much light on a little-understood conflict. On the other hand, Walden Bello's contribution on the Philippines is unaccountably weak: he says little about the social grievances that underlie the New People's Army insurgency (or President Corazon Aquino's inability to address them). Likewise, he fails to point up the crucial differences with the failed Huk rebellion of the early '50s (the Huks never had a national base, which made defeating them relatively easy).

Historical legacy: In many respects low-intensity warfare is so much old wine in new bottles. Tracing U.S. experience in counterinsurgency would take us back to the

suppression of Shay's Rebellion in the 1780s. Thomas Jefferson conducted our first limited contingency force projection—"anti-terrorist" operation when he ordered a naval expedition against the Barbary pirates. And today's "peacekeeping" missions (usually a cover for more sinister motives) have their precursor in William McKinley's intervention in the Chinese Boxer Rebellion in 1900.

Not even proinsurgency is new. The U.S. backed anti-government rebels in Nicaragua in 1909-1910. The CIA supported pro-fascist insurgents in the Ukraine after World War II and also sponsored anti-

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Chinese guerrillas operating from Burma in the 1950s (creating instead an opium ring). *Low-Intensity Warfare*, the book, recognizes this

lineage though it notes only a few of the antecedents in passing. In this respect, the full story remains to be told.

But the book succeeds in pointing up what is new and ominous: the Reaganites' preoccupation with low-intensity warfare and covert operations as a way to reassert and reestablish U.S. dominance. In pursuit of this objective they have expanded, upgraded, and systematized U.S. unconventional warfare capability to an unprecedented level, seeing it as a (if not *the*) key foreign policy instrument.

Rambo's budget: Pentagon spending on Rambo-esque "special operations" forces (Delta Force, SEAL teams, Rapid Deployment Forces, Light Infantry Divisions) and their attendant hardware has sextupled since 1981—making it the fastest growing component of the war budget—to a current annual \$2.5 billion. That figure doesn't include the billions spent each year on CIA covert operations (which have tripled under Reagan).

And much of the combat in low-intensity warfare is non-military, with billions more going for psychological operations and the foreign "aid" aimed at winning the hearts and minds of target populations. U.S. "economic" support for El Salvador alone has cost nearly \$2 billion since 1980, three-fourths of it directly related to the war. As Peter Kornbluh notes, U.S. military maneuvers in Honduras probably constitute the largest and most expensive psychological warfare operation in our history. Surveying the low-intensity military buildup, Stephen D. Goose concludes, "The most basic questions of what interests these forces are supposed to protect, and how they are to protect them, have not been adequately answered."

Richard Barnett warns in his summary essay that "reconciling national security with the requirements of democracy now poses the greatest challenge to the idea of popular government since the nation was founded"—if anything, an understatement in the era of the Iran-contra affair. Klare and Kornbluh's *Low-Intensity Warfare* is a good place to start arming for what needs to be a high-intensity debate.

Karl Bermann is a frequent contributor to *In These Times*.

Walk

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 creative leg up early on. Right now, concurrent with the development of *A Walk in the Woods*, Blessing has begun work on two other scripts. One, *Cobb*, concerns Ty Cobb, baseball's "Georgia Peach"; another, now under the working title of *A Quality of Tears*, concerns the kidnapping of an American in Beirut. The latter is scheduled to premiere

this summer at La Jolla.

Power of reason: *A Quality of Tears* sounds like another step toward political relevance for its maker, but Blessing's mission remains anything but explicitly political. "It's simply a hard issue to deal with emotionally," he says. "And I'm looking for ways to deal with it. That's what really got me into writing *A Walk in the Woods* as well."

It's that larger issue of the political human element—often im-

itated, seldom mined effectively on stage—which continues to engage Blessing the dramatist. Cynics might call him a victim of Pollyanna-itis, but he genuinely believes in the power of reason in the face of global nuclear destruction, no matter what the statistics show.

"At the same time we're talking about this or that treaty," he says, "we're working as hard as we can on SDI, on all of the new generation of technological breakthroughs in

weaponry. That's not slowing down...both countries always run on both tracks. They work very hard at building weapons; they work very hard at controlling them. And they're much better at building them because human beings have been doing that for thousands and thousands of years, and they haven't had to control them until 1945."

The comparatively puny gamble of Broadway aside, the mass appeal

of *A Walk in the Woods* has already been tested in pre-New York airings, and its easily mounted, two-character requirements should lead to a healthy post-Broadway afterlife. If it has a neat, easily summed-up message, according to its author, it is simply about "the importance of hope. I also think, however, it's important to be educated, to find ways to think about all this."

Michael Phillips is the theater critic for the *Dallas Times Herald*.

By David Volpendesta

Veteran writer Heinemann bringing the war back home

AN HOUR AFTER CHICAGO WRITER Larry Heinemann, winner of the 1987 National Book Award in fiction for his novel *Paco's Story*, arrived in his San Francisco hotel room he was laughing, almost uncontrollably, on the phone. "In These Times," he intoned in a voice that intimated familiarity with the Chicago-based weekly, "I have to come from Chicago to San Francisco to be interviewed by *In These Times*?"

The next night, just prior to his appearance at the Bay Area's most prestigious literary venue, Black Oak Books, Heinemann was still savoring the irony. Devoid of literary pretense and affectation, Heinemann exudes a down-to-earth, no-nonsense aura. In fact, he's so modest about his success as a writer, it has to be dragged out of him that in addition to receiving the National Book Award, *Paco's Story* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) was also given the Carl Sandburg Medal (Chicago's premiere literary award), the Fiction Prize from the Society of Midland Authors, the Chicago Fiction Award by the Friends of Literature, and was also one of the recipients of an award from the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Despite his calm exterior, Heinemann began to speak intensely about his experiences as an Army grunt when the subject of Vietnam came up. "I went overseas in March of 1967 and came back in March of 1968," he said. "My MOS (military occupation specialty) was 11-Delta. I was an armored intelligence specialist. I was in recon. A hundred years ago I would have been in the horse cavalry. I would have been the poor jerk with the funny hat who would ride out in front of the battalion to find the Indians."

Being there: Heinemann paused for a long second before he continued: "I was drafted in '66 and submitted to conscription with what could only be called a soul-deadening dread. I was 23 and somewhat older than everyone else...everybody else was 18...I knew the war was fucked before I went over, that there was no reason for it. And being over there certainly didn't change my mind. As a matter of fact, when I came back in '68 I was radicalized. I was just plain radicalized."

Unlike some others who were radicalized by the Vietnam war and have subsequently found careers prostrating themselves before the icons of neo-conservatism, Heinemann hasn't been screaming *mea culpa* for his political insights. In his acceptance speech at the National Book Awards banquet, Heinemann made a point of emphasizing exactly where he stood in relationship to the current historical revisionism of Vietnam and the war being conducted by the Reagan administration in Central America.

As he puffed slowly on a cigar, he recalled the last remarks he made in that speech. "There's just one



Award-winning author Larry Heinemann at home in Chicago.

more thing I want to say. Somehow there's a notion going around that we could have won the war. I don't know where this came from because I don't know any grunt who thinks that way. To say that we could have won the war is to say that we didn't hate them enough. Or we didn't strafe or bomb them enough. We didn't turn enough of their women into whores. Or we didn't zip enough hootches. Or we didn't bomb them far enough back into the Stone Age...If we allow the same thing to happen in Central America it will be the shame of our lives..."

"Then I sat down and Richard Rhodes, who was given the National Book Award for non-fiction, got up and gave quite a lengthy lecture on nuclear weapons. It was quite something. There was a very political cast to the whole evening which I don't apologize for at all. Those kinds of cultural decisions are crucial."

Street-wise sensibility: Just as crucial for Heinemann is the translation of words into action. In that spirit he and his wife Edie (to whom he's been married for 20 years and with whom he has two children) are

active members of Neighbor to Neighbor, a nationwide, grass-roots group involved in lobbying Congress and the administration to stop contra aid. Given his working-class background (both he and his father were drivers for the Chicago Transit Authority) and the fact that he both lives in a working-class neighborhood and identifies himself as a working-class writer, Heinemann feels comfortable organizing on the street.

Heinemann's street-wise sensibility also informs his blowtorch prose. His novel *Paco's Story* essentially traces the return odyssey of Paco Sullivan, the sole surviving member of Alpha Company. Heinemann masterfully captures the power, rhythms, and nuances of the spoken American language with such precision and lack of literary self-consciousness that it invites favorable comparison with another brilliant Chicago writer, playwright David Mamet.

Unlike Mamet, however, the musicality of Heinemann's language is more akin to blues than jazz.

Paco's blues: In *Paco's Story*, no

one is having a good time. Narrated by ghosts who are deceased members of Paco's company, the novel plunges into the phantoms of Vietnam that haunt Paco's mind while graphically describing his alienation and intense physical pain. Able to walk only with the aid of a black

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hickory cane, Paco's body is a mosaic of scars. Nevertheless, he survives with an inspiring sense of dignity, which is all the more poignant as he becomes a symbol of those grunts who endured the horrors of Vietnam only to return home to another labyrinth of nightmares.

In the book Heinemann's currently writing, which focuses on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among Vietnam veterans, Heinemann is still dealing with those nightmares. Mentioning that he's been working on the book since 1984 when he went out to the Olympic Peninsula on an assignment for *Harper's Magazine*, he described it as an extended essay that he hopes to complete this spring.

"To me," he commented, "this book is the final story. *Close Quarters* (Heinemann's first novel) is a war story. It really deals with what happened overseas. *Paco's Story* has much more to do with the reverberations since the war...The book about delayed stress is mainly about healing and how Vietnam veterans (I suppose anyone who has lived through that type of ghastly trauma) have come out of that..."

According to Heinemann, about 900,000 of the 2.5 million Vietnam veterans suffer enough from PTSD to require some type of treatment. Among Vietnam veterans, PTSD is

In *Paco's Story*, winner of the National Book Award, Vietnam Veteran Larry Heinemann masterfully captures the power, rhythms and nuances of spoken American English.

as urgent a topic of discussion as is Agent Orange, and it affects more people. Explaining that all the veterans he knew were now either approaching or had passed middle age, Heinemann commented that the main themes of the book are

now Vietnam veterans see themselves as men, husbands, fathers, and a generation of soldiers.

General disregard: The book begins with the 1986 Veterans parade in Chicago, which occurred on Father's Day weekend, and examines it as a celebration while exploring the contradictions inherent in that notion, one of which was the presence of the Parade Marshall, General William Westmoreland.

"When I heard that General Westmoreland was going to be the Parade Marshall," Heinemann said, "I was dead-set against having anything to do with it because I felt, and I feel now (probably even more strongly than before) that General Westmoreland is responsible to a large extent for the conduct of the war...I wouldn't get in line behind him if he was only going to a shithouse. I wasn't going to march in that fucking parade. I wasn't going to pass by the reviewing stand and salute that cocksucker. He gave the orders that dropped Agent Orange, dioxin. He's the guy who welcomed *Bob Hope*, this jerk. He's the guy who just loved every minute of it. He's the guy who killed friends of mine."

Nevertheless, Heinemann was persuaded to go see the parade and is grateful that he did. "People like to call it a healing thing," he said. "I don't know about that. I do know it was the first time, except for the parade in New York and the parade at the Memorial in 1982, that veterans got to see themselves as a group. And it was the first time in that way that we got to share any kind of fellowship. And I mean fellowship with a small 'f.' It was a real demonstration of brotherhood."

Although he describes himself as a slow writer who works on only one book at a time, he's already decided that when he finishes the book on PTSD he'll write another novel. "I prefer fiction to non-fiction...I'm a much better b.s. artist than a researcher," he laughed. "It's easier to imagine imagery than it is to get imagery from other people...When I finish the book on delayed stress, I'm going to start on my Chicago novel. I have a title already. It's called *Cooler by the Lake*."

Smiling, Heinemann explained that the novel's title is taken from a phrase commonly used by Chicago meteorologists in the summer, and the tone of his voice assumed the same ironic delight I'd heard on the phone the night before. "It's cooler as in *hip*," he laughed. "Cooler as in the temperature is cooler. But also cooler as in *cooler of beer down on the beach*. And it's going to be about Chicago working people and some of the characters who live in my neck of the woods."

David Volpendesta is co-editor of the forthcoming *City Lights* collection of Central American short stories, *Clamor of Innocence*.