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## Air War Hanoi

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the Vietcong and North Vietnamese regulars to call the time and place of battle.

According to Gibson, neither the Americans nor the South Vietnamese government made any serious effort at land reform, so essential for pacification and winning "the hearts and minds." Americans could not communicate with most Vietnamese, so a wide gulf grew between the few Vietnamese who could speak English and the majority, who were not consulted. Profits could be made by corrupt suppliers and Vietnamese officials at the expense of both the American taxpayer and the soldier who was being shot at in the field.

The air war in the North never was as effective as the war managers hoped it would be because large, viable targets were not readily available and could not be justified. Expensive aircraft and million-dollar trained pilots were not cost effective when sent to destroy 55-gallon drums of fuel oil. The damage they caused was easily repaired, using peasant laborers, who, like their counterparts in the South, saw American technology as something to be hated.

So where can we place the blame for a war we could not lose and yet we did? If the military had had a freer hand, could it have "won" the war? If something does not work, is it proper to use a bigger hammer? Where did the system break down? Is it possible to learn from the failure in Vietnam to understand guerrilla war and how to counteract it? How could we have kept the population

from supporting and supplying the revolutionaries?

The call for "No More Vietnams" should be echoed at every military strategy session, at every seminar on future wars, at every gathering of veterans who compare notes on each unit's activities in Vietnam; but not for the same reason that the radicals attempted to shut the United States down. Rather we should learn from our mistakes and develop tactics to work with the local population in any future engagement. This would require courses in our war colleges in the culture, language and history of potential trouble spots.

Who is the enemy? Is it those among us who refuse to look at criticisms, even those as unbalanced as Gibson's attempt at self-flagellation? Read the book not for the reason he wrote it, but rather to better understand the nonmilitary elements of society.

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Dorr, Robert F. *Air War Hanoi*. New York: Sterling, 1988. 190pp. \$24.95

The author makes it clear from the start that his book is about the air war in North Vietnam. He is not concerned with the efforts in South Vietnam and Laos to support ground forces and interdict supply routes from the north. For those aviators with an opportunity to do both, flying down south was fun. The odds were in your favor. Someone else

would find and mark the target, and a grateful voice would thank you for your work (provided you hit the target and not the voice). Flying into North Vietnam, the “real” north in particular—route pacs five and both sixes—was hardly fun, especially during the latter years of the war. Exhilarating, satisfying, ego-boosting, stuff of stories—but not fun. Some claimed they loved flying up north. Some were crazy. My roommate, now a politician, wouldn’t “jink”; claimed he would spot them the first shot. Still, the odds tended to be against you up north.

The author walks us through the air war beginning in August 1964 when operations consisted largely of reconnaissance missions throughout South Vietnam. Although the photo aircraft and their escorts occasionally came under fire, that was not considered “real” combat. I recall that Da Nang had a French name, “Tourane,” on the map I used. Then we lost a couple of RF-8s and that started the retaliatory strikes. The author ties the facts and sea stories of his research together effectively to set the stage for his subject, the air war against Hanoi. If you have not formed a fixed opinion about the events that precipitated the first carrier air strike in North Vietnam, the author will give you something to think about.

Clearly, Robert Dorr did extensive research and, after reading his book, you will feel that the Air Force was more forthcoming than the Navy. Much of his Air Force story

appears to be drawn from detailed documents, while his account of the Navy’s participation is mostly from interviews. The author seems taken with aircraft serial numbers and tail letters, especially the Air Force’s adoption of the Navy’s tail-letter system to identify the aircraft’s home (airfield or carrier airwing). As one of the few self-evident acts during that period, it does not need the emphasis the author gives it. Nor does the issue of camouflage. The Navy tried it, dropped it; the Air Force tried it and kept it. Camouflaging an aircraft that trailed 10 miles of black smoke might appear futile to some: I recall a FAC telling me he preferred working USAF-camouflaged birds because they were easier to see.

Each chapter covers approximately one year, beginning with 1964 until the end, 1973. After providing the chronology of operations, Dorr discusses the buildup, the retaliatory rules, Operation Rolling Thunder, the stand-downs, and finally the Linebacker operations. The book’s organization permits the reader to easily examine events that occurred simultaneously.

The manner in which Dorr discusses the direction of the air war from the Oval Office is fair and accurate, though his frustration, after interviewing former in-country commanders whose advice and recommendations were ignored, is evident. He also got caught up in the emotion of his research, causing

him to opine as to who was the best tacair pilot during the war.

This is essentially a picture book, and the sources that provided the greater number of photos were given the more detailed accounts. Still, it is good reading. The Mig killers are given stirring write-ups. I was pleased to see the enlisted tail gunners granted their due but saw nothing on the efforts of the guided missile cruisers and destroyers. Most of the Linebacker account is given over to the B-52s. Other things happened, but that operation was the Stratoforts' finest hour. At least that is how I would feel if I had been over Hanoi in one of the damn things.

*Air War Hanoi* is quick, easy reading with lots of photographs, some well-known, but enough new to keep your interest. There are factual errors and misprints, but reading about the exploits of people you know and events in which you took part is enjoyable. If you were not there, it is still great reading.

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Forbes, John and Williams, Robert. *The Illustrated History of the Riverine Force: The Vietnam War*. New York: Bantam Books, 1987. 158pp. \$6.95

Marolda, Edward J. *The Illustrated History of Carrier Operations: The Vietnam War*. New York: Bantam Books, 1987. 158pp. \$6.95

Simmons, Edwin H. *The Illustrated History of the Marines: The Vietnam War*. New York: Bantam Books, 1987. 128pp. \$5.95

This trilogy of paper books provides a summary of U.S. naval operations conducted "in theater" during the Vietnam war. As a group, they contain more than the usual amount of text for an illustrated history. This may be in anticipation of a video-taped version of the books. The volume entitled "Riverine Force" is perhaps misleading because it covers all "brown water" operations including the CTF 115 (Market Time) coastal patrol operations and CTF 116 (Game Warden) river patrol operations as well as the CTF 117 Mobile Riverine Force (MRF) operations.

The books are reasonably well done, although they suffer badly from a shortage of charts that would have helped to illustrate the battles described in the text. Instead, photographs are employed to give a general sense of the action, if not the direction. One cannot help but remember TV news using the same technique during the war. However, this time the slant is on the bravery of the men fighting the battles—a refreshing and welcome change. These volumes would be most useful to the casual reader; not the serious student of naval history. There is a reminder in there for all of us, however, which is revealed somewhere near the beginning of the third volume, as you realize you are reading about yet another separate and largely unrelated war. Further,