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# The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam

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States has undertaken. It also points out that the misuse of Special Forces by those who have little concept of unconventional conflicts is the road to disaster, not only for the Special Forces, but for the U.S. military.

Some of the most poignant parts of the book are in the appendices, "Special Forces Personnel Missing in Action" and "Special Forces Medal of Honor Recipients." One need not have worn a green beret to understand the meaning of such a sentence as ". . . was wounded in the left leg, captured by North Vietnamese troops, and never seen again," or the sentence, "Enabled his surrounded company to escape by charging several Viet Cong positions before he was killed by a rocket . . . in Long Khanh Province, Vietnam."

This book will find its place on the shelves of those in Special Forces and all those who understand unconventional conflicts and Special Forces. More important, it deserves a place on the shelves of those concerned professionals who know little about Special Forces and unconventional conflicts. For those people it can shed light on the realities of such warfare and the fighting men who carry it out.

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Hallin, Daniel C. *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. 285pp. \$22.50

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Professor Hallin has written a painstaking and provocative study of the U.S. media in Vietnam in which he focuses on what he regards as the myth that print and television reporters opposed Washington's policy from the beginning and, thus, helped lose the war.

It took Hallin, who teaches political science and communications at the University of California at San Diego, 10 years to turn out *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*. Even then, his extensive research which included content analyses of 779 newscasts of the three major networks from August 1965 to 1973 and numerous interviews with reporters who were there, was limited to only one newspaper—the *New York Times* whose files he examined from 1960 to mid-1965. One may question whether one newspaper's reportage, even one as important as the *Times*, is enough upon which to make general conclusions about the print media.

Hallin writes clearly and with a minimum of professional jargon. Ample quotes, public opinion poll data and statistical graphs illustrate his points. He strives for balance. Yet, when all is said and done, he fails to come to any hard and fast conclusion as to the extent of the impact the media had on Washington's decision to wind down the war and quit the field of battle. He does conclude, with many others, that the majority of the media, not unlike the American people and Congress, supported the war effort in the early days and perhaps up to the time of the Viet-

cong Tet offensive in February 1968. The media would resent Hallin's suggestion that it was a willing tool of the U.S. Government at the outset. As he noted, the *Times* carried many stories highly negative to American policy on Vietnam as far back as 1963.

Page one stories of raids on Buddhist temples by Saigon troops and the self-immolation by bonzes were regular fare for *Times'* readers. This so upset President Kennedy that he later told the American people that major personnel changes in the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem would have to be made. Given this green light, U.S. officials encouraged South Vietnamese Army leaders to stage a coup. In the course of events, Diem, an elected official and, like Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, was assassinated. Coincidental or providential, three weeks later to the day, Kennedy was assassinated.

While the author downplays the roles of television and the *Times* in turning American public opinion against the war, he acknowledges that he cannot be certain as to what the impact of negative reports really was. He notes that Tet, which was a severe military defeat for the Vietcong and its cadres in the South, marked the beginning of the first sustained period in which television screens showed the war as the bloody and brutal affair it was. Tet also marked a great increase in editorialized reports and commentary, much of which fed the growing war-weariness of the American people.

Hallin discusses, albeit only in the briefest way, the idea that if a politi-

cian were to believe that television shapes public opinion, and were to respond to the news as an indication of public sentiment, then the news might shape the course of politics regardless of the actual impact on the public. In this connection, he recalls Walter Cronkite's commentary while on a trip to Vietnam during the Tet period in 1968. The CBS TV anchorman concluded that the war had become "a bloody stalemate." When President Lyndon B. Johnson heard that, he figuratively threw in the towel. "It's all over," he is said to have told White House aides.

Could official censorship have changed things? In any future war, Washington may want to ponder this question given the lesson of Vietnam and, more importantly, because some American reporters now regard themselves as citizens of the world whose search for truth, which is to be revealed as soon as it is discovered, takes precedence over victory, either military or political. While Hallin concedes that public opinion eventually became a powerful constraint on U.S. policy and was, indeed, decisive, as Ho Chi Minh had predicted, he has a reservation here.

It is not clear, he argues, that the result would have been any different if there had been censorship—fewer negative stories by print reporters and the total exclusion of TV. But if it were not certain the results would have been different, it is equally uncertain they would have been the same. The author believes the United States could not have defeated the Vietnamese revolution at any reason-

able cost and had little real national interest there.

It might be of some interest to note that after citing help with his book from Jack Citrin and Todd Gitlin, Hanna Pitkin and Samuel Popkin, Hallin reports that he greatly benefited from conversations with Daniel Ellsberg.

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Broyles, William, Jr. *Brothers in Arms: A Journey from War to Peace*. New York: Knopf, 1986. 284pp. \$17.95

Soldiers always want to know how it is on the other side of the hill. The staff is interested in the whys and hows of strategy and tactics; the frontliner really wants confirmation of what he suspects—the other guy isn't having an afternoon at the beach, either. Mr. Broyles belongs to the second group, although strategy and tactics are not slighted in his account. He was an ambivalent volunteer in Vietnam (without putting words in his mouth one can hear him saying that the U.S. role may have been morally defensible but it was an operational mess) who served as a Marine infantry first lieutenant around Da Nang in 1969-70. He went back to Vietnam in 1984 to get a retrospective view of the other side, as well as to appease some private furies. On the surface he was no postwar misfit; he resigned as editor of *Newsweek* to try this trip.

As a report on the reverse slope, Mr. Broyles' book is fascinating. His

respect for the Vietnamese soldier is immense; in this he echoes many U.S. fighting men, if not their air-conditioned staff and Pentagon colleagues. Vietnamese steadfastness, cleverness and ingenuity in tactics, hardiness and moral strength are all reported and praised. Mr. Broyles concludes that the last came from nationalism, a force generally underestimated by the United States in Third World enemies and ignored in Third World friends and allies. That the Vietnamese in both the South and North were to find their patriotism and sacrifices misused by their Marxist-Leninist leaders does not denigrate the soldiers' motives. A Gallup Poll among Continental Army veterans faced with propertied Federalist rulers might have been a shocker in 1789. Thus read, Mr. Broyles may be saying (without condescension) no more than Kipling did about the Fuzzy-Wuzzy: "You're a poor benighted heathen, but a first-rate fighting man."

When we read beyond this generous view we come to a problem. Mr. Broyles was hardly free of Vietnamese official control—his itinerary, interpreters and, one suspects, interviewees were largely picked for him. Not that he was naive. He reports the mind-dulling dogmatism of Communist officials, the dreariness of life in the North, the discontent in the South; and he does not overlook Vietnam's post-1975 record of the boat people, Kampuchea, etc. But there remains a wish that a reporter of Mr. Broyles' talent might have been able to cast his net more widely.