

## Naval War College Review

---

Volume 40  
Number 2 *Spring*

Article 23

---

1987

# Brothers in Arms: A Journey from War to Peace

J. K. Holloway

William Broyles Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Holloway, J. K. and Broyles, William Jr. (1987) "Brothers in Arms: A Journey from War to Peace," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 40 : No. 2 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol40/iss2/23>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

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.

L. EDGAR PRINA  
Washington, D.C.

---

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.

On the POW-MIA problem, this lack of scope was equally frustrating to author and reader. The book reports that members of the Swedish mission, who have the most freedom of action among foreigners in Vietnam (why?), report seeing Americans on work gangs. But the Vietnamese official in charge of North American affairs repeated the usual line: "They have all been released. There may be a handful who chose to stay here, but no one is being held against their will."

Looking at the U.S. entry into the war from the view today in Vietnam, Mr. Broyles is succinct, if not altogether precisely accurate: "And the fear that started it all, the fear of Chinese expansion. Well, we are now China's most important ally, while China's most bitter enemy, and the staunchest foe of its expansion into Southeast Asia, is of course Vietnam."

One would like some of the academics, journalists, policymakers, etc., who enthused over the Vietnam intervention, to make a journey such as Mr. Broyles did. Everyone can make a list of prospective tourists: this reviewer's would certainly include Joseph Alsop, the Bundy Brothers, Samuel Huntington and Walt Rostow. If they can't go, maybe they could read *Brothers in Arms*.

J.K. HOLLOWAY  
Naval War College

*Modern Historical Experience*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. 628pp. \$25

"The Vietnam War was the most challenging military experience in U.S. history, a synthesis of politics, technology, the residues of past wars, convoluted logic, and symbolism—all merged with enormous firepower and a surrealistic mixture of illusion and clarity on the part of American leaders." With this statement, Gabriel Kolko begins chapter 14 in his latest work.

The potential reader is cautioned not to be fooled by the title—this is only an account of the war in Vietnam to the extent that a minutely detailed analysis, for example, of social conditions in Weimar, Germany in the 1920s tells the story of World War II. More than anything, this book chronicles the Communist Party of Vietnam to a degree perhaps unequalled in any other work and is, for this reason alone, probably worthwhile reading for those who may be interested in what is, according to the Marxist framework within which the author conducts his analysis, the "modern historical experience."

A good deal of the book is devoted to examining the organization which Ho Chi Minh was able to develop and nurture, with particular focus on postwar retreat by the colonial powers which was the result of, "above all, the relationship of the united [opposition] front to the class struggle over land." If the reader can sift through the author's obvious sympathy—almost to the point of fawning—for Ho and the movement